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## Jerry Robbins, January 29, 2019

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Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with Dr. Jerry Robbins (JR)

Interview conducted by Historic Preservation graduate students Matt Jones (MJ) and Rachel Burns (RB) on Tuesday January 29th 2019.

Transcribed by Grace Pare

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MJ: I'll read the introduction then we'll get into some questions. I'll be asking a lot of the questions and Rachel will jump in from time to time. If you see me glancing at this screen once in a while it's not because I'm bored it's just that we have to make sure it's still, still operating. So if you want to go off the record at any point just let me know and I'll push stop or we can at least mark it so that we can omit it and after the interview we'll transcribe it and send it to you so that you can....

JR: I can revise and extend my remarks like they do in Congress, then? Okay!

MJ: Yeah, and then after that we'll be uploading it to our Archives website and also it will be featured on the website of the Provost too because I kind of split my time between the Provost and the Archives.

JR: What do you do for the Provost?

MJ: Well, kind of this same thing. What I'm doing now is going to be used both by the Provost and the Archives. They want to feature some Emeritus faculty, obviously the Archives wants their record on tape for their own purposes, so you'll see yourself featured on their webpage too at the Provost office.

JR: I'm glad Rhonda's into that. That's good.

MJ: Yeah, so here we go. Here's an introduction. It's Tuesday, January 29th, 2019. I'm Historic Preservation grad student Matt Jones along with fellow Historic Preservation grad student Rachel Burns and today we are in room 306 of Halle Library talking with Dr.

Jerry Robbins. Robbins served as Dean of the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University from 1991 until 2004, a period during which the College of Education grew swiftly and sustained its reputation as the largest producer of teachers in the nation. Robbins was awarded the Volunteer Award by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in 2005, the President's Award by the Association of Teacher Educators in 1988, and participated in the White House Teacher Preparation Conference and has authored numerous articles and books on education. I know that these introductions leave out a lot of things but if I had to go through the whole thing it would probably take the whole time, so we'll touch on a lot of other things but is everything correct that you heard there?

JR: I would like to make a clarification on one point. Yes, during the period of time that I was Dean of the College of Education and, for some years prior to that, EMU was indeed the nation's largest producer of professional educators. Not necessarily the largest producer of teachers, but the total of new teachers, teachers getting an advanced credential, principals, counselors, superintendents, other school personnel, etc. I get into trouble when people misinterpret "largest producer" as being just teachers. No, we were not necessarily the nation's largest producer of teachers, but we were the nation's largest producer of educational personnel in total.

MJ: Okay, good to know that. Well, so I know you were born in 1939. Can you tell us about your upbringing a little bit? Where, when, about your parents?

JR: I was born in 1939 in the small town of De Queen, Arkansas. At the time of my birth, my mother was a homemaker and my father was working for his father in the retail and wholesale oil distribution business, although Dad had an undergraduate degree in chemistry from the University of Texas. At the beginning of World War II, the high school science teacher in that community was drafted in mid-year. To finish out the school year

my father was asked to come teach a 7:00 a.m. class in chemistry to high school students for the rest of the school year. Dad liked that so much and the superintendent liked him so much that, even though he didn't have the appropriate teaching credentials, she hired him as a full-time science teacher. Because there weren't any other men on the faculty--they had all been drafted—the superintendent said “you are also the principal” of this small high school. So, most of the time I was growing up in De Queen, Arkansas, my father was the high school science teacher and principal. Dad went to summer school every summer for years and years to work off the courses needed for his teaching credential and eventually to get an administrator's certificate in Arkansas. When he had all of that in hand, we moved to Conway, Arkansas when I was in the sixth grade. I did junior high and high school in Conway, Arkansas with my father as my high school principal. In the meantime, my mother became an elementary and middle school teacher. I lived at home while obtaining an undergraduate degree at Hendrix College. My younger brothers also became teachers.

MJ: Did you ever have to go to the principal's office?

JR: Once, but I dealt with the assistant principal and that was undoubtedly the better choice!

MJ: Well, I know that your undergrad is in math, right?

JR: Yes.

MJ: So did you have aspirations to teach or get involved in education while you were doing undergrad?

JR: Very much so, but there was a problem. Hendrix College was a relatively expensive church-related college that I was attending. Going there was a financial burden for my parents. I had to live at home during all of my collegiate years to save money. My mother, in particular, was very, very insistent that I go into something in the sciences to “make more money than your father is making as a school teacher and administrator.”

“You can do better than that” was what I heard over and over. So, I started out at Hendrix College as a physics major. I had tested out of a number of courses in several fields and was really interested in teaching. But I had this parental opposition, particularly from my mother, for doing so. But, by my sophomore year in college I screwed up my courage and I said to myself “I not only want to be a teacher, I want to be a music teacher.” So, I changed my major to music for my sophomore year and enjoyed doing that. But of course, by that time I was a year behind everybody else in the long sequence of courses that you had to take to get a teaching credential in music. When it came time for my junior year, the college policy was that you had to declare a major and stick with it for the rest of your collegiate career. I quickly examined my record and the catalog and I found that I couldn’t get out of Hendrix in the next two years with a music degree. What was I closest to having a degree in? Well, I had tested out of some required math and I had continued taking math courses. I found that I lacked only a few courses in math having all of the minimum requirements for a degree in mathematics. So, I said “I’m going to be a math major.” That opened up a large number of electives for me which I could take in music, which I did. I took everything necessary to get a teaching credential in music as well as in mathematics. By the time I graduated I had a degree in mathematics, I had far more hours in music than I had in mathematics, and I had an Arkansas teaching credential in mathematics, instrumental music, and choral music. I have a lot of undergraduate hours on my transcript because I took very heavy loads and some correspondence courses. But I made all that happen in four academic years.

MJ: Wow, so how did your family respond to you wanting to be a music teacher? Because you said that they wanted you to do better than your dad had. Going from a physics major and a math major to wanting to be a music teacher seems like it would be pretty hard for your family.

- JR: It's a long story, but I was the highest-paid beginning teacher in Arkansas in 1960-61 and I got an even better-paying job the next year. By the time I was 26 years old I was making more money than my dad did, and I did so for the rest of my career. That took care of my parents' argument about "making money."
- MJ: Okay. When you were doing your undergraduate and grad school training, where did you go for grad school?
- JR: Both my graduate degrees--my master's and my doctorate--are from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and both are in the field of Educational Administration. I was a classroom teacher for a short while but afterwards I was ready to move into school administration and I needed the credentials for that.
- MJ: Why did you make that turn? Why get out of the classroom?
- JR: My father was a career high school principal, starting at an early age. My view was that if he could do that, I could too, and be just as effective at it as he had been and was. I was fortunate that, at the time, there was an enormous shortage of teachers and principals such that many small school districts were willing to take young and inexperienced principals. I wasn't a principal for very long, but that was my line of thinking at the time.
- MJ: Right, okay. How did you choose to go to the University of Arkansas?
- JR: Economics. As an Arkansas resident I could pay in-state tuition and, at the time, it was the only doctoral program in educational administration in the state. I was paying my own way, with the help of a couple of low-paying part-time jobs, and I couldn't afford to go to an out-of-state institution. I really didn't have much choice in the matter. You folks know about paying for graduate school!
- MJ: What was your first major research project? Do you remember your thesis?
- JR: I was always interested in student activities—the so-called extracurricular activities--and I did my dissertation on that topic. I was looking at trends in what kinds of clubs, sports, music, and other kinds of activities that the high schools in Arkansas were offering; what

was popular and growing in numbers of programs; what had been in place in the past; and what was declining or had been eliminated. In short, it was a study of trends in student activity offerings in Arkansas high schools.

MJ: Yeah, okay. Well I saw, looking you up online a lot and in our files as well, most of your, if not all of your schooling, took place in the south. Arkansas, Georgia State I think, and where else? Were you in Mississippi too?

JR: My formal education was all in Arkansas, except that I have three graduate credits from each of the University of Mississippi and Georgia State University. I worked as a classroom teacher in Arkansas, my principalship experience was in Missouri, and then I went to the University of Mississippi as a very young assistant professor. From there I went to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, from there to Georgia State University in Atlanta, and from there I came here to Eastern Michigan University.

MJ: Yeah I guess I was wondering what pulled you up north? How did you get to EMU?

JR: Money. And prestige of the institution. While I was in my doctoral program, my aspiration was to be the long-term principal of a large, progressive high school. A salary offer took me instead to a position on the faculty at the University of Mississippi. I became the chair of my department there. That led to an aspiration to be an administrator in higher education. I had the opportunity to become the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. After five years in that role, I went to Georgia State University, first as Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and in other central administration roles, but later as the dean of the large College of Education.

Then the position became open here at Eastern Michigan University. Everyone in the field knew this was the nation's largest producer of education personnel. Eastern Michigan had this incredible national, even international, reputation at the time, for not only being big but for being quite good at what was being done in the field of Education. The salary offer was about the same, but the fringe benefits were much better here than

at Georgia State University, so my take-home pay was somewhat more as I made the move. As a result, coming to EMU was an advancement in my line of work in a number of ways. I didn't know much about Michigan or Ypsilanti or Ann Arbor at the time, but obviously I fell in love with the place and I've stayed here ever since then, even after retirement.

MJ: Do you remember how many other people went out for the job? What kind of application field was that? Were there a lot of other educators looking for it?

JR: For the job here?

MJ: Yeah.

JR: I don't know anything about the initial pool of applicants, but for an extended period of time, I was aware of the fact that I was the number two person for the position. The Provost's office wouldn't give me either a yes or a no answer because they were obviously trying to make a deal with the number one person for the job. I was at the point of accepting another job that was giving me lots of pressure to tell them yes or no. I told the people here "you've got to tell me whether I'm still in the running or not." The response was essentially that "the number one choice took a job somewhere else, you are number two on our list, so you get the job."

MJ: Okay, okay. So you did apply other places?

JR: Yes, I had applications in other places. Both for being a provost and for being dean of some institution's College of Education. Some of these positions were of interest but the position as Dean of the College of Education here was of greater interest than all of the others. It was the one I hoped to get.

MJ: How does being the dean of a school of education in the northern states compare? Is there a difference in how they look at education practices?

JR: Yes.

MJ: Can we hear about that?



JR: The biggest single difference is that I had never worked in a unionized environment before coming here to Eastern Michigan. I knew a fair amount about unionized environments from two sources. One was from participating in national meetings of deans, many of whom reported on their local experiences with unions. The other was from participating in national training activities, such as American Council on Education Fellows program and the Harvard Management Development Program. In those there was a lot of emphasis given to how administrators needed to work in a unionized environment versus a non-unionized environment.

I had been well alerted, during the interview process, to the fact that there was a way that “things worked” at EMU that was different from what I was used to. I learned quickly that the most important thing was to be extremely familiar with not only the faculty contract but with the contract with the clericals and with other unionized workers here on campus. I would have to say that I feel I was successful in working within EMU’s unionized environment. I never got directly grieved on anything of any consequence. I did have to deal with a few grievances that had originated in the organizational structure below me and that were appealed up to my level.

Every state has its eccentricities in terms of state regulations about how you prepare educational personnel. When I first got here, I had to be very sensitive to what the state regulations were on those matters. However, in my early years here, many of those state regulations began to change rapidly, but I was “in the loop” to be part of the change process. But that’s a whole other story.

But, yes, as an answer to your question, the primary things that were different in working in a northern institution and a southern institution were (1) working in a unionized environment and (2) being very sensitive as to what the state regulations concerning preparation of professional educators happened to be.

MJ: Yeah. How do you review those regulations? How do you get familiar with them?

JR: When I got here, that was pre-Internet times. It was necessary to find paper copies of the regulations and then read and read. I had to ask questions of the long-term department heads in the COE and of staff in the Michigan Department of Education. I asked questions of my counterparts at other public institutions in the state. Statewide organizations such as the Michigan Dean's Council--the Education deans at the public institutions—and the Michigan Association of Colleges for Teacher Education were very helpful as well. I ended up in leadership roles in both of those organizations.

MJ: When you got here in 1991 what kind of campus did you find when you arrived? I was going to the Ed. School while you were still dean, but that was later, so I can remember, what was it like in 1991? I know that you weren't in Porter yet.

JR: No, we weren't and that's a long and somewhat sad story.

MJ: We're gonna get there, yeah.

JR: In 1991 my office and a substantial part of the College of Education were in Boone Hall. Boone had been built around the time of World War I and it had not had very much done to it since then. There had been plans for a long period of time, several decades in fact, to build a new Education facility here on campus. One of the attractions for me coming to EMU was that, at the time, building a new Education building was number one on the building priority list for EMU. A substantial appeal to me was the opportunity to get in on helping to design and build a new freestanding Education building somewhere on campus. We needed to get the College of Education substantially all under one roof.

Faculty and staff members at the time were having to put up with extremely unsatisfactory working conditions. Part of the College of Education was in the Warner building, with as many as four faculty members having to share an office. Part of the Department of Teacher Education was in Pray-Harrold and another part was in the Library, with the remainder in Boone Hall. The Department of Special Education was in the Rackham Building, but many of the faculty offices there still had plumbing fixtures—

including one with a bathtub—left over from the building’s residential school days. COE faculty and staff members and the instructional spaces they used were scattered all over the campus.

Worst of all of our facilities was Boone Hall, for faculty, staff, and students. For years, EMU’s central administration had taken the position that, “in the near future,” Education was going to be out of Boone and that Boone would be torn down or have a major renovation. As a result, central administration could not see the value of investing any money to upgrade Boone. I could see their argument, but when you had to live with and in Boone Hall every day, it was in horrible shape. We were in extremely crowded conditions there. Faculty offices had been improvised in all sorts of former classrooms, there wasn’t any air conditioning, and we were on Cross Street with lots of traffic noise. In the summertime the heat was just unbearable in the classrooms and offices on the top floor of Boone Hall. We had to raise the windows to get some sort of ventilation in there, but then you got all the street noise.

Nothing in the building worked very well, either. It was difficult to use projected material because there was no way to darken the rooms on the top two floors. We overloaded the electrical system almost every day as computers and electric typewriters came online. I’d have to go around to tell people to turn off lights and shut some equipment off so I could then call Physical Plant to come trip a circuit breaker. Soon I figured out how to do it myself--“illegally” --and I would get electricity back on in the building. The offices and classrooms and other instructional spaces in the basement of the building were also in bad condition, but for different reasons. We eventually had to abandon the basement level because of environmental conditions.

Our years in Boone were generally pre-internet or very early internet days. We didn’t have any connectivity with anything outside of that building. I had an antiquated computer in my office that, through telephone wires, was connected to, I believe, five or

six other places on campus. This connectivity was essentially useless because the people in those other offices rarely looked at anything that I sent them anyway. Gradually, some of my staff members, quite extralegally, strung telephone wire lines through the heating tunnels to connect a few places in Boone Hall to the University's mainframe computer. In the fall of 1993, through a very complicated arrangement, I managed, for the first time, to send an email to a colleague at another university from my office—and get a reply!

My personal office in Boone Hall had one redeeming feature. The original occupant of the office was the university president, so I had a private rest room! However, overall, for most of the 1990's, we had very poor working conditions for the faculty and staff and a very poor learning environment for students in the College of Education.

MJ: That's so surprising to me just given Eastern's history as a Normal School and the emphasis on education and the conditions were so bad for the Ed. School.

JR: We finally got that fixed in 1999. But I—and we--went through the period 1991 up until 1999, when we moved into the Porter building, under dreadful working conditions for everyone on the College of Education faculty and staff.

MJ: You mean in Porter? The conditions were bad in there too?

JR: No, no! In Boone, Warner, Rackham, Prey-Harrold, and the other places we were on campus.

MJ: Right, okay. Well we can just talk a little bit about the move to Porter. How were you involved in that?

JR: Here's how that evolved. Matters progressed in the early 1990's to the point where a facility for Education was the number one building priority. We in the COE had all of our program statements prepared; that is, what activities would be taking place in the new building; approximately how much space would be needed for offices, classrooms, and specialized spaces; and the like. All of that was ready to hand to an architect. However,

at the same time, there was a big movement on the campus that held that, yes, Education needed help, but the Library at that time was also in bad shape. The Library was, indeed, very overcrowded, not nearly big enough, not nearly technology-oriented enough, and otherwise a very traditional library in very many ways. This movement held that a new Library ought to be the top construction priority. The movement gained momentum and getting a new Library building quickly became a high priority. It looked like Education was going to get shoved back down the line again. Further, Governor John Engler announced that he was not going to approve more than one construction project per campus during that fiscal year. So that meant that EMU leadership was faced with the issue of “is our ‘one construction project’ going to be a new building for Education, or a new Library”?

From the selfish standpoint of just the College of Education, the faculty and I were disappointed in the decision that was made. It pushed Education several years down the line for appropriate facilities, we didn’t get all we felt we needed, and it took years to “finish” what became the Porter Building.

However, from a campus-wide perspective, a wise and clever decision was made under the circumstances. I don’t know that President Bill Shelton devised this scheme himself, but he strongly supported it and I give him much credit for “working the system” to the campus’ credit.

The “one project” would have three phases. It would be focused on building a new Library, but the new Library needed to be where the Physical Plant facilities were then located. So Physical Plant facilities would need to be re-located, and that would be Phase I. In Phase II, EMU would build a state-of-the-art Library and move the Library holdings and staff into that new building. When the Library moved, there would then be a large empty building in the center of the campus. It just happened that Education needed bigger and better facilities, so, in Phase III, the former Library building would be

converted into a new home for the College of Education. And, as Education moved out of several places on campus, that would give EMU more room for needed offices and classrooms in those buildings.

Was this not clever? It became relatively easy to persuade both Governor Engler and the various other authorities in Lansing to agree to that. But then the issue, especially in Lansing, was “how much is all that going to cost?” Well, the University gave them a dollar figure and the authorities authorized spending that amount of money. In retrospect that turned out to be a very, very low estimate and I fault certain Physical Plant employees of the time for making extremely low cost estimates, apparently without sufficient consideration of the various program statements for both the new Library and the renovation for Education of the former Library building.

I believe there were cost overruns in moving the Physical Plant operations to its new and current location. There were huge cost overruns in building the new Library building. As a result, there was not much money left to convert the former Library building into a new home for Education. But, as construction started on the new Library building, central administration hired an architectural firm to work with us in Education to do the detailed planning for new facilities. This was an excellent choice, an architectural firm of very nice people that I enjoyed working with very much. They were highly creative, even as they realized they had to work on a very limited budget.

In an early stage of working with the architects, they observed that what is now the Porter Building was built as a library, with an infrastructure to hold the great weight of shelving and books. The building had and has load-bearing columns on a grid throughout the building on all floors. These are structurally essential to hold the building up and cannot be moved or changed. The architects noted that they had to design all of the proposed interior walls and corridors considering this grid of columns. If you go in Porter now and look around, you can't find very many of those columns. The architects did a

fantastic job of hiding the columns in walls and places where you don't see them. I was very pleased with the work that they did with that structural aspect. But the roof needed to be replaced and a utility space serving multiple buildings was to be located on the bottom floor. These ate into the money available for fixing the inside for Education.

But I got involved in decision-making when the architects said that some of the spaces where a size had been specified had to be a little larger or a little smaller to fit the rectangular grid of columns, otherwise there would be a column in the middle of a room. The decisions I made were usually on the side of larger-sized spaces. But, the effect of that was that we lost some of the spaces that we had hoped to have in the building. We lost a few classrooms and we lost a few offices and specialized spaces just to make things fit the rectangular grid of columns in the building.

There were a lot of other decisions that had to be made with the architects during the planning process. For example, the library had been built at a time when the enrollment at EMU was majority male and the number of toilet facilities reflected that. I observed to the architects that the student body of the College of Education was, and likely would continue to be, approximately 80% female. The architects agreed, but that meant substantial adjustments to the plumbing and other systems of the building—and a cost that central administration planners likely hadn't considered.

Eventually the architects reported that what was available was just not nearly enough money to do what needed to be done. They said to me and to central administration, "you've got to ask the State authorities for more money." And the architects came up with an amount.

Central administration took the position that it was pointless to ask State authorities for that much money, on the grounds that it wouldn't be approved and might be counterproductive instead. Central administration finally agreed to ask for a smaller amount, which they did, and it was authorized.

That still wasn't enough. Demolition and re-construction started on the former Library building. Through the efforts of our outstanding architects and an equally talented construction company, we got the roof replaced; all the walls up; all the electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and other systems operational; and all the built-in furnishings completed--generally on schedule, ready for Fall 1999 classes.

We had a beautiful "new" building! Except that, other than for what was built in, the rooms were empty. This was just days before classes were to start. There had been no money to buy furniture for the classrooms and numerous other spaces.

We had to have something in the classrooms and other spaces. So, we moved in the old furniture from the buildings we were vacating—Boone, Warner, Rackham, and Prey-Harrold. As a result, we had this beautiful new building, lovely surroundings, furnished with beat-up, mismatched, inappropriate, antiquated furniture that needed to be discarded. Further, there were few computers or other technology for the offices, labs, and other specialized spaces—even as all the infrastructure was in place for a "high-tech" building.

Just before classes were set to start, we invited a large number of University central administrative officials over to see what we had. Needless to say, most were horrified! "Why is all this old furniture in here?" "Where are the computers and other technology to connect to all the hi-tech infrastructure?" I—and we—could only respond that, for years, it had been pointed out by a variety of parties that there wasn't enough money to complete this project.

Suddenly, in central administration, there was a lot of scrambling around to get us the money to buy the necessary new furniture and equipment, but it meant taking money away from the other colleges and units on campus. Provost Ron Collins gave us essentially the entire equipment budget for Academic Affairs for furnishings. The deans



and department heads in the other colleges were very unhappy about that. I don't and couldn't blame them.

It took several years to resolve this mess. Furniture and equipment were ordered, but in many cases, it took months to get delivery. As new furnishings came in, we had to assemble and locate it ourselves, after which we discarded the old furniture it replaced. Eventually we got the Porter Building in rather good shape. During the remainder of my time as dean we raised a lot of private money to finish this out such as to make the building one of the best Education facilities in the state, if not anywhere.

MJ: Yeah, alright. That was a great answer. Thanks for that. Alright. Your predecessor was Scott Westerman, right?

JR: Yes.

MJ: Okay, we got a lot of material from Westerman here and actually Westerman's dad too who, when I was first digitizing audio recordings I had to go through Scott Westerman's Father's sound collection where he recorded everything that came out of this radio between 1955 and 1970. So I'm pretty well acquainted.

JR: I didn't know about the recordings. His father was a clergyman.

MJ: Right, right. But do you remember...can you say anything about Westerman? What it was like to fill his shoes?

JR: His were particularly big shoes to fill. Especially as I was coming in from the outside. Scott Westerman had been the superintendent of schools in Ann Arbor before he came to EMU and then he had served in several capacities in the College of Education before he became dean. He and his wife had been here in the community for a long time in very prominent positions. They knew everybody and everything in the community, and of course I was walking in cold. I didn't know the school leaders in the area. Scott knew them all personally and had worked with them in a variety of capacities. I must give Scott great credit for being an extremely helpful mentor during my early months. He was

readily available by telephone and we talked a great deal during those early weeks and months. I would just call him up and say something like “you’ve got to explain something to me.” “Tell me about so and so; tell me about the Saline school system.” He was extremely helpful. He made a point of coming around a lot, but for very legitimate reasons. I would find him in the building and we would stop and have a chat. He made himself very readily available. He was very friendly, very helpful, and very supportive. Matters continued that way up until his death just a year or so ago. We became and remained very good friends.

MJ: So the College of Ed. responded well to your hiring?

JR: Well, I hope so! At least nothing bad happened during my early months. I think the faculty and staff realized that I was an experienced dean from my work at two other institutions. They were well aware that I had just come from another institution that was very large in Education and had multiple doctoral programs. As a result, I think they realized that I did have the necessary skill set, even if it was going to take me a while to learn the faculty, the administrators, the area school people, and the people in Lansing that were influential on what we did. So, yes, I would say I had at least as warm a reception as any administrator would have in a unionized environment.

MJ: Alright, well when I think about the College of Education it’s such a prominent program and I never think...I could never imagine that it needs recruitment tactics or strategies. Did you have to actively try to recruit students to come to the College of Ed.?

JR: Yes and no. Let me give a bit of context. During the Twentieth Century, it happened that, nationally, the enrollment in professional education programs took the general form of a sine wave of about 10-years duration between the peaks. The statistics showed that EMU generally followed that national trend. There would be a peak in enrollments about every ten years and then there would be a valley about every ten years before the numbers started going up again. That trend no longer exists. The valley that’s going on

right now, both at EMU and nationally, has lasted appreciably longer than 10 years. But, during the 1991 to 2004 period, we went through both peaks and valleys. And, to get to your question, when enrollments were on the rise and approaching a peak, we didn't have to recruit students. Instead, we had to struggle to handle the people who just showed up on their own because EMU's method of allocating resources didn't track that sine wave very closely. On, the other hand, when we were part of the national decline in numbers, to their credit, central administration was careful not to cut too deep, too fast, in the COE resource allocations.

Naturally, as we began to decline in enrollments each time, there were efforts made to recruit more people into educator preparation programs. But that was an uphill battle for us and every other educator preparation program in the country. Better-paying jobs than teaching for women and minorities became available. There was a fear among many prospective students that school districts were not doing much hiring and, as a result, there might not be a job for them after completing a program. Teaching in high-demand fields, such as mathematics and science, was in competition for talent with high-paying jobs in the private sector. It was extremely difficult to combat these social changes over which we had essentially no control.

We had appreciable success in attracting career changers. These were people who had been in some other line of work for a while but they were interested in and willing to make a career change into teaching. Interestingly, we had a few physicians and lawyers who said "I would rather teach than doing what I'm doing now." We had a lot of other people with undergraduate or graduate degrees in something totally unrelated to education that said "I want to become a teacher and Eastern is the place to come to prepare for that." At one point we had a rather large number of these "post-graduate" students, most of whom were occupation changers. In fact, there were some statistics that indicated that we had as many or more of those than any other institution in the country.

I think much of it was due to our reputation as having an outstanding teacher preparation program.

Probably our biggest recruitment effort, whether we were in a peak or a valley, was in terms of trying to recruit minority students. We were involved in several efforts to do that. Dr. Robbie Johnson, who was associate dean for much of the time I was there, was an African-American woman, heavily involved in an organization called Y.E.S, the Young Educators Society. This was a future-teachers-type organization with clubs in a number of Michigan high schools. In most of the high schools, the membership was majority-minority, African-American in particular, but with some Latinx/Hispanic, Native American, Asian-American, and mixed-race involvement. We brought those middle school and high school students to campus. We showed them around, and we showed them a good time while we were doing that. We had other groups of minority youth that we were working with. We were bringing students from Detroit schools to campus, even elementary and middle-school age kids, to show them around and say, “you know, here’s a good place to go to school and you ought to be thinking about being a teacher.” It didn’t happen overnight, but gradually we increased the proportion of our Education student body that was minority. We put a lot of time, effort, money, and energy into activities to recruit and retain minority students, both during the peaks and the valleys.

MJ: Okay.

JR: Okay, enough of that.

MJ: No, no keep going we encourage rambling and you’re giving us a lot of specifics which is really nice.

RB: Can I jump in?

JR: Sure

MJ: Go for it

RB: I just want to ask a broader question. We've spoken to Linda Pritchard who's dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and she just kind of described what her roles and responsibilities are as dean of CAS but I was just wondering if you had to put into bullet points what does the dean of the College of Education do and what would make it different from other deans on Campus?

JR: I'm glad you've interviewed Dr. Pritchard. In fact, I was chair of the search committee that recommended that we bring her here. I enjoyed working with her for the entire time she was dean of Arts and Sciences. Anyway, I know her well, although I haven't seen her very much recently. My responsibilities as dean of the College of Education involved, first of all, the same things as are the responsibility of any other dean. We all had responsibility for facilities and equipment; managing a budget; and a variety of personnel matters, including hiring full- and part-time faculty and staff members, and review of promotion and tenure applications.

My job differed from all of the other deans in that the national accreditation of educator preparation, and the comparable approval by the State of Michigan, were and are a campus-wide approval and I was in charge of both during my time in office. At the time, the national accrediting organization, which has since changed its name, was NCATE—the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The state process, managed by the Michigan Department of Education, was known as Periodic Review/Program Evaluation.

It is true that the College of Business has a national accrediting agency and several other programs on campus, such as Nursing, also have national accrediting bodies and processes. But none of those accreditations involve anywhere near the scope of what is involved with Education accreditation. State approval is even more important, in that unless we hold it, our program completers cannot be certified to teach and thus can't obtain jobs.

The national accreditation and state approval processes were a big matter that I had to give a lot of time and attention to. There was a formal visit every five years or so, but there was something substantive related to these groups all the time. Another time-consuming activity that had little or no counterpart elsewhere among the academic programs of the university was dealing with all the regulations of the Michigan Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature concerning Educator preparation. One huge set of state rules had to do with testing of prospective teachers and certain other prospective education professionals before they entered our program and testing them again before they were eligible to exit.

So, I would say the biggest difference between my job and all of the other deans on campus was, in summary, dealing with our national Education accreditation process and dealing with all the things that we had to do to comply with various state regulations. In connection with the state regulations, it was necessary that I go to Lansing or some other central meeting spot very frequently. As a result, I'm sure I was in Lansing more than all of the other EMU deans put together to deal with some sort of political or policy matter.

RB: Thank you.

MJ: I think I remember reading about you testifying in front of the state Congress. Is that...? And one of your quotes was, you laid out the whole case for the education program, and I think it was right at the end or something you said basically, I'm paraphrasing, basically we're doing a good job with the resources that we have, and I wondered if you were trying to be a little backhanded when you said that?

JR: Probably. In Mississippi, Georgia, and Michigan I testified frequently before education committees of the state legislature on various things having to do with educator preparation and sometimes other educational issues. I testified before Congress once. It was

before the House of Representatives committee that dealt with several matters, including education. So, yes, I'm comfortable and experienced around legislative bodies.

MJ: Is there any kind of balancing act between the faculty and higher administration that you have to tread as a dean? Is that difficult?

JR: I wouldn't say it's difficult, but the balancing is something all deans have to be sensitive to. As a dean, you are middle management—an essential concept for all to keep in mind. As a middle manager, you have some latitude, some freedom, some discretion on some issues. However, on the one hand, you have a “boss”—the Provost—and you also have to be subservient to the President and the Board of Regents. On the other hand, you are the leader and spokesperson for the faculty, staff, and students of the college over which you preside. In those instances where the central administration's view on an issue and the faculty view on the same issue are at variance, you have to work carefully. You have to choose your words carefully, trying to keep communications open in both directions, trying to explain each side's view to the other party, trying to find middle ground. When middle ground can't be found, and one side's position has to prevail, then you have to go to the “losing” side and say, in effect, “this is the way that it must be. We are going to have to work with this and make it work as best we can.” Having to deal with such conflict situations is not fun, but it's part of the job of any dean.

MJ: Do the needs of the faculty change over your time as dean? We usually ask faculty members how they saw students change over their tenure here, but it'd be interesting to hear how faculty needs have changed while you were here if they did?

JR: I can think of two things immediately. One is that during the years before we moved into Porter, faculty and staff members were working in horrible working conditions. They very legitimately grumbled about that. But once we moved into the Porter Building, most needs were met and the grumbling essentially stopped. The other thing was that Scott Westerman had not had the opportunity to hire very many faculty members in the years

before I came. The COE faculty members when I came in had generally been here for an appreciable length of time. Some of them were, of necessity, having to teach courses for which they were not as well prepared as would be desirable. During the years between 1991 and 2004 many of those people retired. As they retired, we hired, for the most part, younger people to replace them—and people who had the academic skills we needed. The demographics of the faculty changed appreciably between 1991 and 2004. The average age became younger and the faculty members were much more geographically diverse in terms of their education and experience. More importantly, we increased the number of female and minority faculty members.

MJ: You said earlier that you didn't get a whole lot of grief from people and that it was mostly positive and that's true. Sometimes when I do this research, you gotta look for some of the controversies that were happening and there was nothing. But I did find in an article written by Rita Kramer back in 1991. She was just talking about the shortcomings of teacher's education and she criticized EMU for teaching sex education and AIDS awareness. I was wondering what your response to that was because I didn't get that far.

JR: We tried to ignore Rita Kramer as much as we could.

MJ: Who was she?

JR: Rita Kramer was a freelance writer who had connections with a number of conservative organizations and conservative publishing outlets. She decided, or somebody decided for her and sent her, to do a national exposé of teacher preparation through writing a book and articles. The assumption under which she and her sponsors was working was that children in K-12 schools were not learning enough, or the right things. The further assumption was that the reason the K-12 schools were "failing" was that teachers, especially relatively young teachers, were incompetent. And, of course, the reason such teachers were incompetent was that teacher preparation programs, especially in many large public institutions, were failing to prepare new teachers appropriately. Ms. Kramer



visited a number of teacher preparation programs, including at EMU, to do “research” to “prove” her biases.

Interestingly, Ms. Kramer wasn’t the only writer that came to EMU. We had a number of writers from major news publications and national organizations who visited and who came to very different and commendable conclusions. Ms. Kramer made her way into some COE classrooms; she didn’t like what she saw and later said so in rather strong language. She interviewed faculty members and students who later reported that what she attributed to them was not at all what they had said.

Ms. Kramer’s book got into print. Excerpts from the book showed up in a variety of right-leaning publications, including specific references to EMU’s programs, faculty, and students. There was nothing to do but ignore that bad and inaccurate publicity as best we could. Fortunately, within a few months, a number of responsible researchers and writers reviewed her book. We began to read reviews of Ms. Kramer’s book that basically said, “this is a bunch of nonsense”; “her research methods were not appropriate”; “she obviously had a bias and she was attempting to justify her bias”; “we’ve checked with the institutions cited and they are not happy with how they were represented in her work”; and “we recommend that nobody pay any attention to Ms. Kramer’s ‘research.’”

MJ: Alright. People that had criticisms of the school were they based on trends in education that were happening at the time or...? I mean what were some of the educational trends of the 90’s that you were dealing with here?

JR: Charter schools came on the scene. The faculty of the COE at the time was strongly opposed to having anything to do with charter schools, even though the Board of Regents had determined that EMU should be in the chartering business and should work with at least the ones that EMU chartered. I was heavily involved with supporting the faculty position on charter schools.

It was also my job to support the faculty in the content they were teaching. How to teach reading was a controversial issue. There was major pressure, especially from conservative groups, that reading should be taught solely through phonics, a position contrary to our understanding of research and best practice. I had to gladly support the faculty on this issue. Similar issues came up concerning what should and should not be taught in history, especially American history. In the health education area, there was controversy about almost all aspects of sex education. I was glad to support the COE faculty in all these controversial areas because I agreed that the faculty position was based on research and best practice.

MJ: How much contact do students have with the dean?

JR: Not much. In general, I saw two extremes of students. I saw the very good students who had won some sort of award or received some kind of recognition. Often this involved some kind of ceremony. I got to meet some very nice and talented people that way. I was proud of our students who received recognitions such as the State Student Teacher of the Year, the State First Year Teacher of the Year, and other similar recognitions.

At the other extreme, I saw some students—and talked to their parents and lawyers—who had gotten themselves in some degree of difficulty or in some substantial controversy and I had to try to help unravel their situation. Unfortunately, most of our students fell in the middle between those two extremes. I wrote something just a few days ago that one of my regrets is that I didn't make the time or take the time to have more interaction with students, particularly a large number of them that have since gone on to accomplish substantial and highly honorable matters. They were students when I was there and I never even met them, or make the time to talk.

MJ: You did coffee with the dean.

JR: Actually, the “coffee with the dean” activity was primarily a faculty and staff event. There were a few instances where I went to the student lounge in the Porter building, with refreshments, and a “the Dean is in” sign. Frankly, I didn’t get a whole lot of response to that.

MJ: Do you think you would have had enough students? I would have thought you would. I know I would have been there.

JR: We probably didn’t publicize it well enough. We weren’t sensitive enough to the times of the day and days of the week that were convenient for students to be on campus or to be in the student lounge.

MJ: On the other side of it did you have a close relationship at all with the Provost? Like Ron Collins?

JR: Yes.

MJ: What was Ron Collins like?

JR: I worked with Ron Collins from the time I came until the time that he suddenly and unfortunately died. We had our agreements and we had our disagreements. I suppose every dean on campus who worked with him could say that. It didn’t take me long to find out that his background was in Chemistry and that he was a very quantitative-oriented kind of person. I also discovered that my predecessor Scott Westerman--a historian by training—had been going in to see Provost Collins with the oral argument for doing or not doing something. Scott’s arguments weren’t always effective.

I had rather good luck with going in to see Provost Collins armed with charts, graphs, and tables of data related to what I was asking of him and what COE needed. I have an undergraduate degree and some graduate course work in mathematics. I’m a former teacher of math and I’m a rather quantitative-oriented person myself. It was actually fun to construct charts and graphs to support my requests. This approach was reasonably effective.

MJ: Did you try the oral approach first?

JR: Yes, I did, because I had been dealing that way with many of my former bosses at other institutions--until I discovered that Provost Collins was influenced by numbers.

MJ: You also served under Paul Schollaert. What was he like?

JR: Paul Schollaert was a sociologist, with a specialty in demographics--which meant a lot of numbers. I used a mix of methods in making requests of him. Sometimes it was a narrative focused on human interest that I thought would appeal to a sociologist. Yes, that had some appeal for him, but I also kept bringing charts and graphs with me as well.

MJ: It sounds like the relationship between dean and provost is one of just constantly asking for things.

JR: Yes.

MJ: Justifying your requests.

JR: Given EMU's somewhat strange budget processes at the time, yes, all the deans were constantly asking for things.

MJ: Is that different from other places?

JR: It was the exact opposite of what I had at Georgia State University. I had a budget for the year that included a great deal of flexibility in how to spend the money. It was rarely reduced, but extremely difficult to increase, in mid-year.

MJ: Okay. Well we're getting close to the end of my questions here. Can you tell us anything about your relationship with the President? Does the dean interact with the President?

JR: Not much, and even when we, the deans, had interaction, it was typically in some large group setting such that there wasn't much individual interaction. I was only in the President's office a handful of times during the entire time that I was here and that was by his invitation for one reason or another. I can't think of any instance where I just walked in or asked for an appointment.

MJ: Yeah

JR: Bill Shelton was the President when I first came to EMU and his academic field was Higher Education. Let me digress a moment to talk about Bill Shelton. I was a young faculty member in the School of Education at the University of Mississippi early in my higher education career, at the same time that Bill Shelton was a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Mississippi. Oddly enough, neither one of us has any recollection of ever meeting each other or crossing paths during that period of time. But once I got here, we discovered that we knew a lot of people in common from the University of Mississippi, from the Memphis area, and from northern Mississippi. We had opportunities to talk about mutual acquaintances. That had nothing to do with our work here, but it was always a good conversation starter when I did have the infrequent chance for some private communication. We invited him to speak at our big college events during each year and he was very good about making appropriate remarks at those times. He occasionally taught in the COE as well. But my interaction with him was primarily in ceremonial functions rather than in any sort of substantive situation. I think that would generally be true of Linda Pritchard and any other deans that you have interviewed or will interview. We were only in group settings with the President for the most part.

MJ: I guess I've always wondered what the relationship to the President is for anyone outside of the Board of Regents.

JR: Well, there are unexpected occasions. After Bill Shelton left and went elsewhere, I found one of his successors and his wife in the Detroit airport. We had both just flown in on different planes. They had arranged for some kind of transportation between Metro Airport and Ann Arbor that had failed to materialize. I was making small talk with them as we were all picking up luggage. The president and his wife were grumbling about the fact that they were going to have to find some commercial way to get back to Ann Arbor. I invited them to ride back with me. At the time they were living in a temporary president's

home in Pittsfield Township less than a mile from where I live. I assured them that it was not out of my way. They had an enormous amount of luggage and I was basically in a two-seater vehicle. But we managed somehow to get them and all of their and my luggage home. It was interesting to have an hour or so with the President and his wife in a very informal situation. Yes, you run into occasional things like that, but interactions between any dean and President are not common.

MJ: I have to ask who was the President you drove home?

RB: Was it Kirkpatrick?

JR: Yes.

MJ: Okay. I guess I have some pretty broad questions that we always wind it up on but before I get to them I just want to talk about the Ypsi band.

JR: Oh, okay.

MJ: You were the conductor for 13 years I think I read?

JR: Yes, that is correct.

MJ: Is that something you were doing when you were down south too?

JR: Yes. I had been playing with community concert bands and orchestras all my adult life and I had been especially involved with church choirs. At one point when I lived in Atlanta, I decided that instead of spending a lot of time with church choirs, I wanted to spend more time with some concert band. There was a North Fulton Community Band in the north Atlanta suburbs. I joined that group as a trombone player and it wasn't long before I became the assistant conductor of that group. I served a number of summers as the conductor of that band for an extensive summer concert series. The first summer I was here in Michigan I saw a notice that the Ypsilanti Community Band was to perform in Riverside Park for the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival. I went to hear the group and afterwards asked about how to join. I was told to show up with my instrument when activities

started in the fall. I did so. Within a couple of years, I was named as the assistant conductor of the Ypsilanti Community Band. I was serving in that volunteer capacity when the then-conductor retired in the summer of 1998. He had given the Band's board considerable notice that he was going to retire from that position, but they hadn't done much of anything in terms of finding a successor. It came time to start the fall 1998 series of rehearsals and performances and there wasn't any conductor. The leadership came to me and said, in effect, "will you please look after things 'for a few weeks' until we can make an appropriate arrangement for a conductor"? "For a few weeks" turned out to be 13 years!

In 2010 we changed the name of the organization to Washtenaw Community Concert Band because we entered into an official affiliation with Washtenaw Community College. In 2010-2011 I was a part-time faculty member for Washtenaw Community College in the music program, just as I had been a part-time faculty member in the EMU Department of Music from 1998 to 2002. I continue to play with the Washtenaw Community Concert Band. I also play with the Dexter Community Band and, in the summers, with the Ann Arbor Civic Band. A few years ago, I conducted an entire concert of the Ann Arbor Civic Band and I still occasionally conduct the Washtenaw Community Concert band.

MJ: Wow. That's so cool. Did you ever try to recruit kids from the music school here?

JR: Generally, no. However, from 1998 to 2002, the Board of the then-named Ypsilanti Community Band had an arrangement with the EMU Department of Music, as it was named at the time. During those years, we rehearsed and performed here on campus, using a lot of EMU's equipment and music. We were functionally the third concert band of EMU, rehearsing and performing in the evenings. That attracted a number of EMU students who couldn't schedule being in one of the regular EMU bands. We picked up a

lot of rather good student players that way, as well as some EMU faculty and staff people who played with us. The Music Department terminated that arrangement after four years.

MJ: This might be way out of left field, but does conducting a band resemble being a college dean?

JR: In a few ways, yes. There are organizational matters that are common to both. There's a lot of preparation in either role. There are personnel issues and facilities and equipment issues that are common to both. There are a lot of "management" matters in common, but the substantive parts are rather different!

MJ: Well, we got three questions left here. What do you think, this can be broad, you can go any direction you want, what do you think, if there is one, is your biggest contribution to EMU?

JR: There are two things I'm particularly proud of. One of those is that we maintained, during my whole period of time as dean, the status of being, each year, the nation's largest producer of educational personnel. Not that the numbers themselves are that important, but the numbers represent a quality component. There's no way you can be "big," without also being "good" at what you do. Unfortunately, a number of societal trends, over which no Education dean at any institution can control, have brought an end to those large numbers. I was lucky to be in my position during "the golden years."

The other thing was planning for and getting the COE into what is now Porter Building. In 1999, when we first occupied the Porter building, I can truthfully say we had—for a while--the best facilities for professional education in the state.

I must mention a third accomplishment. EMU's first doctoral program started as I came in. I can't take any credit for all the "political" work that had been involved for multiple decades to make this happen. All of the formal approvals had been received during Scott Westerman's time as dean. The first doctoral students arrived as I arrived. But



there were still a lot of loose ends to take care of. There were all kinds of policies within the EMU Graduate School that applied to master's and specialist students but did not apply to doctoral students. All of those had to be revised, rewritten, expanded, and approved. Forms needed to be prepared, and procedures developed and implemented. Dr. Martha Tack, who, at the time, was the Head of the Department of Leadership and Counseling, had been brought in to EMU as a highly qualified and experienced person to make all of the logistics happen in good order. I knew Martha from an earlier time and had great confidence in her abilities. As a result, I didn't need to get personally involved very much in those matters, except to give Martha and her colleagues lots of encouragement and every possible support as we were getting the institution's first doctoral program under way. As other doctoral programs have come online at EMU, I suspect it's been somewhat easier for them because a lot of the policies and procedures were already in place. But we helped "invent" all of those.

MJ: Do you remember that first student? I saw a picture, I think I saw a picture.

JR: Well, there was a cohort of students who entered the doctoral program in 1991 and they finished at different periods of time. You are undoubtedly thinking of Joanelle Long, who, in 1994, became EMU's first-ever doctoral graduate. There was an appropriate large amount of publicity related to that accomplishment.

MJ: It's okay. I just wondered, the picture came up in my mind. I think you were on stage with her.

JR: Yes. A big deal was made of Dr. Long's graduation. It was a historic moment for the institution—the institution's first doctoral graduate.

MJ: Okay, well two questions. What do you think is the greatest weakness of EMU? And there can be more than one.

JR: EMU's long-term problem has to do with finances. There is never enough money to do all the things that need to be done. That situation existed during my entire time as dean

and, as best I can tell, it has continued ever since then. I don't have a solution to that problem. It's largely driven by two matters. First, it's driven by state appropriations. These have declined as a percentage of EMU's income dramatically over the past several decades. The lack of stable state support then triggers some other things. It makes it very, very difficult to do any sort of long-range planning because you never know if there is going to be money to accomplish in year two or year three whatever it is that you're planning. The answer is "probably not." Worse, the middle of the fiscal year came—both during my time and since—and there had to be mid-year cuts.

Second, EMU finances are heavily influenced by enrollments, or the lack thereof. This has been, is, and will be very difficult to resolve. The Michigan high school graduation numbers will be getting smaller and smaller each year over at least the next decade. An argument can be made that Michigan has too many public higher education institutions that are competing with each other for students. Can EMU devise ways to reach out to people in their late 20's and 30's and 40's who have part of a college degree and some way, somehow, encourage them to come back and finish that degree? Or start a degree program if they have only a high school education? Could EMU attract more people from out of state? Possibly, and efforts have been made to do that, particularly from Ohio and a few other targeted places. But that's an expensive activity. Dealing with declining enrollments is a very difficult problem, especially for Eastern.

MJ: What about strengths? Greatest strengths of EMU?

JR: Of course, coming out of Education I would have to say that professional education is, and has been, EMU's strength and reputation. A large number of EMU graduates, especially in Education, have gone on to distinguish themselves in some great way. In addition, EMU alums with education degrees have often gone on to success in some other walk of life. I'm in the process of writing a history of the EMU College of Education between 1991 and 2004 and, when finished, it will be placed in the Halle Library. One of

the chapters is on EMU alumni that we recognized during 1991-2004. Typically, these alums had graduated back in the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's but since then they had 10, 20, 30 years to establish themselves in the profession and rise to the top of their line of work.

Anyway, what I'm trying to get to is that Eastern is a great place. It is a relatively inexpensive place to go to school; it has a good faculty across many disciplines; it has an illustrious body of alumni; and it's very attuned to the commuter student, to the part-time student, and to the non-traditional-age student. It serves those "non-traditional" populations much better than many, if not most, other universities. Those are some of the real strengths of the institution.

MJ: Alright. Well is there anything else you'd like to say for the record?

JR: Didn't you have one more question?

MJ: Nope, nope that was it.

JR: That was it, Okay.

MJ: Nope, I've been checking them off as I go.

JR: I've enjoyed doing this. Thank you for the opportunity!