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Jim Olson: James M. Olson. You don't have any trouble spelling any of those. J-a-m-e-s and O-l-s-o-n. My title, I've been everything at the university, from an instructor and when I finally retired I was an emeritus professor of chemistry. I started in the fall of 1959 and I retired in the spring of 2001. I was the Chairman of the Science and Math Division for at least 18 years and perhaps longer. I was an acting Chair, I was an acting Co-Chair, I was an acting Tri-Chair for a short time. Rod Briggs [ph?] wasn't afraid to experiment with anything.

Christopher Butle: What were the circumstances that brought you to Morris?

Jim Olson: My wife and I were looking for a place that I could teach and that was not too far removed from Fergus Falls because that's where her father lived and his health was not the greatest. So, I was becoming qualified to teach in a secondary school. And it turns out that the Ag School here had a history of using student teachers from Concordia, where I had done my undergraduate work. And they also hired a lot of Concordia alumni as their faculty. And who you know; the placement officer at Concordia gave me a phone call one night and said, "There's a guy that's gonna be here tomorrow that's gonna be interviewing and you should go there because you're qualified for what he wants." And the person was Herb Crueme [ph?] that was in Moorhead for I don't know what kind of a convention or conference. We had a 45 minutes conversation. When it was all done he said essentially, "Well, okay. You're hired." I suggested maybe we ought to take a look at the campus and find out what was going on down there. But ultimately, that was the extent of the interview. I must have submitted some paperwork. But came down here that summer and the place was-- they had a 4H Camp then. And the place was just crawling with kids that were I suppose between the ages of nine and 13 or 14. And there was a lot of confusion because the superintendent had died rather suddenly; Alan Edson [ph?]. And so Herb Crueme was the acting superintendent and they were awaiting for a regular superintendent to be appointed. And so yes, here-- this is the teaching position and oh incidentally, we want you to also be the preceptor in Junior Hall. And I had no idea what that involved but it meant living in what's now called Pine Hall and taking responsibility for I think about 85 high school sophomore and junior boys, which was very interesting for my wife because we'd been married that same fall. And she'd never had any brothers. And so I had to translate what some of the shouting up and down the halls meant on occasion. Sometimes I wouldn't translate but she got quite an induction into what being married to a preceptor of a boys' dorm was all about. It was a lot of fun. Thoroughly enjoyed it.

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Christopher Butle: Were you aware that when you accepted the job that this transition was so close to occurring to UMM?

Jim Olson: No, that transition was I had since found out was being talked about on the Twin Cities campus by certain individuals but it was not known out here. And one evening in October, I was walking across the campus back to the dorm and Rod Briggs stopped me. And he said, "You might want to listen to the Cedric Adams news tonight at 10:00 because there's gonna be an announcement." And the announcement was from the Board of Regents that they were gonna establish an experimental college program on this Morris campus. And the fact that he had told me to listen and I didn't-- I was too naïve to put anything together at the time, but he saw me several days later and he said, "Well, kind of stay tuned because there's gonna be a spot for you there to get this stuff organized." And anybody that had any responsibility on the campus at all at that point in the Ag School was put to work working on curriculum, all the surveying. I don't know what all had to be going on behind the scenes but there was an amazing amount of work that was being done. But none of it started until that Regents announcement. And that really took the whole community by surprise.

Christopher Butle: A lot of people understood the phasing out of West Central and the phasing in of UMM. Not everybody was happy, especially Roy Bridgeford [ph?]. Can you talk about him?

Jim Olson: Well, I don't know if Roy was-- he just happened to be a fellow that had a long history with the Ag School. And he was retired. He'd done a lot of world travel. He consulted for I don't know if it was UNESCO or one of the United Nations organizations. And so he had a different perspective of what was going on back here. But then he came back and we had a lot of time to visit. And he kind of helped translate what some of these other people were going through. The Ralph Smiths [ph?], the Wes Gray [ph?] or Roy Thompson [ph?]. That was the agronomist that had taken Roy's place. And they all had this-- they were anxious. They were very loyal to the Institute of Agriculture. And they had been told early on that there was gonna be a lot of cooperation of this new entity and the Institute of Agriculture and the West Central School and Experiment Station. A lot of that didn't materialize apparently; that the cooperation didn't. And the blame for that was frequently pinned on Rod Briggs because of how busy he was and how little time he had to worry about this and that and the other thing. Have you talked to Harley Hanky [ph?]?

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Christopher Butle: We have.

Jim Olson: I would say that his perspective on that would be very interesting because he was just at the part of his career where it was kind of pivotal for him. I think he was in his tenure decision year. So, for him to stay around here, said a lot about his loyalty to the program that he was in because you could see that it was gonna go in a different direction. And so there was quite a bit of tension and lot of people looking back now, their careers were essentially on the line. Were they gonna make it here or were they gonna have to pull up stakes and go someplace else; start over again.

Christopher Butle: Was there a sense that this was a style of life that's time had past. Maybe people were not ready to acknowledge that.

Jim Olson: That was a significant part of-- Ralph Smith, who was the acting superintendent of the Experiment Station when they finally split it and Rod took his college stuff over across the street and Ralph was in charge. One of his research projects was farm accounts that various cooperating farmers would keep daily records of their expenditures and their income. And then sometimes during the winter, they would send all these sheets in. So there would be stacks of these farm account sheets all over the top floor of what was then the engineering building. Now it's called Community services I think. And the analysis of these, I vividly recall the first year, that Ralph, drinking coffee and he was saying that, "Well, what it looks like is that these diversified farms that we have around here, if they're doing cattle and they're raising small grain and they have hogs; one of those enterprises is supporting the other two." And that the recommendation to the farmers was gonna be to specialize. Get out of all this diversification and specialize. Well, if you talk to Dennis Johnson now at the Westrock. It's kind of going back the other way now. If you want to survive as a medium size farmer, you're gonna have to be a little bit more diversified. So, it's kind of interesting how what goes around, comes around. But the research that Ralph was doing in the late '50s and the early '60s, essentially said that yeah, the way of farming, the way of schools, the way everything is working out here in rural Minnesota is changing. The university has to be changing along with it.

Christopher Butle: Can you characterize what kind of person Rod Briggs was?

Jim Olson: <Laughs> Rod was well, the best boss I ever had. He would give you an

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assignment and then that's the last you would hear of it until he wanted to know what the results were. He was incredibly dynamic. He could go on two or three hours sleep. Once they moved off campus, they bought a house over on Crystal Lake that needed quite a bit of work. It was a nice house but it had been neglected. And so Rod and Helen moved the family out there. It was not uncommon for Rod to get up at 4:00 in the morning. Come in to the office, get stuff all set for his secretary to work on during the day. Jump in the car, drive to Minneapolis and meet with everything from legislators to university Regents, to whomever it took to get the job done. Drive back out to Morris. Check the office to see what was going on and do the dictating and stuff that was necessary. And then go home and work on this house for two or three hours and go to bed at midnight or something and get up the next day and start all over again. And he could do that six, seven, eight days in a row without seemingly missing a step. Yeah, he was dynamic to the point of when the excitement kind of wore off, he really-- he was kind of bored toward the end. It was time for him to start looking around for new challenges because he had done all the tough stuff around here.

Christopher Butle: You mentioned that he was involved in every aspect of campus operations. Could you tell us the story of when you saw him working with the grounds crew?

Jim Olson: It turns out that the day that I came for-- Let me see. How did that work? It was one of the first campus visits that I had. Maybe it was the time when we came to look at the apartment because Rod had already started here. So it was after July 1st of 1959. Herb Crueme was walking me around the campus and there were-- what's now this beautiful mall, had a lot of kind of overgrown spirea and other kinds of shrubs and there was no geometry to it at all. It was kind of a mess. And so there were tractors and trailers and people with chainsaws and all kinds of tools out there and they were cutting down all this stuff that was in the center of the mall. Well, it turns out that there were buildings that had been torn down and these had been foundation plantings around those buildings. And once the buildings were gone, nobody had bothered to take out this junky stuff. And Rod Briggs wanted it all gone. And his insistence was that the whole place get cleaned up and kind of aired out a little bit. And the existing mentality was no, we kind of like it. It was grown over. It had kind of this ivy approach. And he was right there telling, "No, take this out. Take-- no, make sure that gets gone." And those sorts of things. And at the same time, Roy Thompson, who was the Station Agronomist came by with some corn plants that he was going to take up to Alexandria because a TV Station up there had a noon farm program and Roy was gonna be the guest that day. And the word was out that you didn't take any specimens. You didn't go off and do something on TV or radio anyplace unless Rod knew about it. And this

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was still in July and he still brand new. But Rod Briggs was an agronomist and Roy was an agronomist. And so they had this discussion back and forth over what we were looking at in these corn plants. To me, they just looked like corn plants. But there was obviously a difference of opinion of what was wrong or right with these plants. But that's when I found out that oh, well, Rod kind of keeps track of everything, doesn't he. <Laughs> Found out later from talking to some of the guys who had been doing the actually cutting and loading the trailers that yes. And they were quite disgusted because this wasn't part of their plan at all; that they were being asked to clean up this mess on the mall.

Christopher Butle: Can you imagine a head of a college today working with the grounds crew?

Jim Olson: No, no, I don't think you'd see that very often. <Laughs>

Christopher Butle: Tell me why Bob Vicander [ph?] was important in your mind to the university.

Jim Olson: Well, Bob took over the admission job because we were struggling. Getting freshman to come to UMM was difficult. And one of the reasons it was difficult was because we had a reputation among the area schools of being very challenging. And so if you wanted to go to college and have fun, you went to one of the other places. But if you wanted to go and learn something, you had to expect to go to Morris and work. And we also were having trouble cracking the market in the Twin Cities area. And so this had to be 1967 I think when Bob started. And it turns out that the moved into a house across the street; a couple houses down from us. And our kids were all roughly the same age so we had all those things in common. I don't know exactly how much analysis Bob did of the situation before he started but he systematically went after the whole idea of getting or hiring recent graduates to be the road warriors and that was a fairly new concept at that time. He was always concerned about our logo and our image in terms of the small-- the printed things. The quality of our bulletin or they were called catalogues in those days. Was always kind of an annoyance to him; there was no uniformity. They were kind of all over the map in terms of format and things. And he recognized what it took to get students interested in coming to a campus like this. And he was also an all-star athlete at football player at August Danna in his undergraduate days. And so he liked football. Turns out that the football coach at the time was Mike Simpson. He lived right across the street from me and two doors down from Vicander. So everybody had kids the same age. So, Bob got involved helping to coach the

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football team. Now, on a campus our size, given the number and the quality of players that they had and the amount of money that was available for intercollegiate athletics, it's not surprising that some would be willing to donate their time. But some of our various campus people felt that this was not what he should be doing. And as the football team grew successful, Simpson left and then Al Moldy [ph?] came in who was incredibly successful. Immediately they became suspicious that there was money going under the table to these athletes. So they were somehow-- they were able to get athletes into this program that really shouldn't be here. And much earlier in the ballgame, UMM had gone on record as saying, we're not gonna have athletic scholarships. We're gonna be a Division III school no matter what. And that was one of the things that I think is still true today is we don't have the resources for that. That's not what we want to be known for. Well, when we had this very successful football program, there was some raised eyebrows about, wait a minute. Are you talking out of both sides of your mouth. And I think the answer is that it was kind of a perfect storm of events in terms of finding-- There were some veterans that came back that wanted to play ball. That helped immensely. The coaching staff had the philosophy that you didn't go out, for example, and looked for a tight end. You went out and looked for kids that wanted to play ball. And then once you got them here, you kind of sorted through and to see who would look like they might be a tight end. That's how they structured the program. They had some very bright guys. One of them was a either a biology or chemistry major. And he would go out and after they would see all the plays on the blackboard in the room, they'd go out there on the field and then he'd tell everybody what their assignment was. And he'd just been sitting there watching like everybody else. So they had some very bright people. But as they were successful, then there was always this suspicion that Bob was doing that for athletics. Well, so then he got out of that. Well then, some of the people in charge around here were convinced that he had scholarship money that he kind of hidden someplace. I don't know how you hide money in the university system. I never could figure that out but-- in all of my experience with budgets and stuff. But Bob had the knack of collecting data. He knew exactly what kind of information he needed to have. He followed through on his data collection. He got to a point where he could tell what the enrollment was going to be and I figured that out within the last couple of years when he left that he would plot this information out and based on when the curve changed from upward to downward on applications, then he could make these predictions. And when the computer came along, he didn't see that as any kind of threat. He was into the computing business right off the bat. And so he and Lynn Schultz [ph?] got to be really good friends and Lynn did a lot of programming for him in terms of collecting this data. And having the kids that were out there working at the various high schools, the road warriors, were sending this information back and it was being recorder and kept track of. So, they had a very good tracking system.

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Christopher Butle: I heard he was controversial with faculty for various reasons. Why was that?

Jim Olson: Oh yeah. Well, he was very confident.

<Crew talk>

Jim Olson: Bob was very confident. Bob knew what he could do. Bob knew that most faculty members didn't have a clue what the admission process was all about. And he had kind of a way with the King's English that every now and then he would kind of mess-up verbs and things like that and that would just irritate the socks off of-- particularly some of my colleagues in the Humanities. And so they saw this guy as just being a big blowhard. And that was unfortunate because he was as knowledgeable as you could ask. The Science and Math Division, we were struggling along with everybody else when Bob first came. One of the things he recognized was if we get faculty interacting with prospective students, students will see that these faculty are interested in teaching. They're not here to do research and all that highfaluting stuff. They want to teach undergraduates. So, he made these on campus days work. Well, I was in the process of becoming an administrator and so he would come to me and say, "Can we get some science faculty to do thus and so?" And I could go out and twist arms partly because I had a little power over the faculty but partly because our faculty were interested in doing that. Oh yeah. We'd put on a dog and pony show in the science auditorium and people would get up there and show slides till you turn purple. And there were all these interesting things going on and we attracted all kinds of students as a result.

Christopher Butle: We still do that today. That was his idea?

Jim Olson: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yeah, bringing these people. They had an extensive array-- you could take your choice of any one of four different shows that you would go to and you could get to three out of four in a day. And bring your parents along. All those kinds of things were being done back in the late '60s. Bob was very alert to what was going on in the national scene in terms of money and where scholarship and financial aid money was coming from. One thing I remember it was the floods in the late '60s or in the '70s or when, but up in the Red River Valley the flooding. And flood money was becoming available to help people. Well, one of the aspects of that that

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apparently not many schools knew about was there was clauses in these bills that were making this money available to go to students that lived in counties that had been declared disaster areas. Well, he had the database. He could go back and find out what counties our students were from and all of a sudden, their financial aid package that had been-- I don't know, loans or whatever else; all of a sudden had a new source of money. They could plug into those students, which then free up that money for other things. So he always had scholarship money that was kind of fluid as far as he was concerned but some of the people around here thought this was certainly coming out from underneath the rug and it couldn't be honest or aboveboard. And so yeah, there were many instances where Bob was in hot water. The Scholastic Committee oversaw admissions and not very many people on the campus actually knew that. But for years, Don Spring was the Chairman of the Scholastic Committee and there was nobody that was more jealous of UMM's reputation and how we did things than Don Spring. Well, Don Spring, I don't think he liked Bob. But he respected him and he knew what kind of a job he was doing. And so those two got along but many other people, they prefer to see Bob as the boogieman.

Christopher Butle: You said Don was jealous of UMM's reputation?

Jim Olson: Jealously guarded his reputation. Yes, yeah. He didn't want anybody doing anything that was gonna mess-up--

Christopher Butle: So he was proud of it.

Jim Olson: He was proud of it and I think it was Don's comment that we can build a reputation in ten years around here and we can lose it in one month from an academic standpoint. And I think that's true. It takes a lot longer to build them up than it does to tear them down.

Christopher Butle: The '60s can be particularly characterized by experimentation. Could you share a story or two that would illustrate by what you meant by experimenting?

Jim Olson: Okay. What did we do that-- everything was an experiment.

Christopher Butle: We talked about finding materials. Sort of a sense of that.

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Jim Olson: Well, it turns out that the Chemistry Department on the Twin Cities campus was very interested and I found out later, had been interested for several years. Because there were murmurings going on in the background of the Twin Cities campus in the early '50s that another unit of the university was gonna get built and Morris was probably gonna be the place. And so the Chemistry Department was gonna make sure that whatever chemistry was started out, that it was gonna be good. And they were onboard with offering us equipment. Well, it turns out that when they would offer us equipment, it usually was because it didn't suit their purposes anymore. My first assignment with Rod that I vividly recall was getting a phone call from him one day saying, "Checkout a university car tomorrow and come down to—" He was in Minneapolis at the time. "Come down and meet with Phil Smith from Plant Services. He's gonna show you some potential chemistry lab benches we can have." So we can have a chemistry lab right in the fall of 1960. And so I got in the car and drove down there and met this Phil Erickson and he took me to three different places. One was old Applebee Hall but I don't know what it is now. But at that point, it was just going out of business as the Pharmacy School. And we looked at these benches and I couldn't imagine how we could ever get those benches to work for us in Morris. And I said, "I don't think so." Well, before Phil and I had a chance to walk out of the building they hit him a couple of times with a hammer and they were in a pile of dry rubble and they were hauling them out in wheelbarrows. SO, we didn't get those but the benches we got were from the Gary Science Building over on the St. Paul campus. And they were brought out and set up in what had been a carpenter shop in the Ag School days. It was a chemistry lab until the Science I was built. And then it became the post office. I don't really know what's over there right now. I know it's not the post office but those benches came from the Twin Cities. They were installed by a plumbing contractor from Fergus Falls that would just continually laugh at the university's specifications for how valves had to be this way and that way. And they were plumbed with regular pipes from the hardware store. And of course, they lasted about two weeks and there was water running all over the floor everyplace. And that's pretty much the way we did it until the new science building was built for us. And it turns out that the Chemistry Department, they'd had a fairly serious fire in the late-- 1958 I think it was. And so there stock room had been completely submerged. So we got all these cardboard boxes that had been _____ around the glassware beakers and so on. They just threw them in a truck, our truck, and they were brought out to Morris. If we could get the dried up cardboard and the moldy cardboard away from the beakers, then we had all this glassware. Yeah, we had a lot of fun.

Christopher Butle: You had to put a <inaudible>.

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Jim Olson: Yes, the stuff that we tended to bring-- the chemists were always very good at bringing back stuff that was usable. Some of my colleagues were into bringing back stuff that their friends in the Twin Cities said was good but turned out really not to be. And we had equipment that was pretty much either non-usable or only marginally functional stacked in closets, in old-- well, we didn't have any old classrooms. But hallways. What's now the Humanities Office Building was at that point a Biology Building. And there were these incubators and pieces of equipment stacked in the hallways that could now be used, would not be used. So then we tried to get rid of them and we found out we had to pay people to get rid of this stuff and then it dawned on me why the people in Minneapolis were so willing to send it out to Morris because we provided the shipping and everything else. And ultimately one of my responsibilities was to say if you guys bring anymore stuff out here, you got to show me where you're going to use it or you can't bring it because it was just getting too expensive.

Christopher Butle: It also shows the resourcefulness and the remarkableness of what they did.

Jim Olson: Oh yeah. We had one faculty member that-- I was approached by a group from Eagle Lake, just outside Wilmer that was a property owner's association that were very concerned about their water quality. And they were gonna put up money and they wanted us to do a research project for them to kind of analyze what their water was gonna be like. And ultimately they were gonna put a sewer line around the lake so then they could check kind of before and after the sewer line. Well, Joe Lateral, who was our analytical chemist at the time, was kind of the honcho behind all of this. And he located two wing tanks from jet airplanes out in Mina, North Dakota and they drove out there with a trailer being pulled behind a pickup truck. Brought back these wing tanks and they became the pontoons for a research watercraft that I have no idea how much it costs. It was a lot of student work involved. One of our chemistry majors was a welder. And there are pictures of it around. A very workable research pontoon. By today's standards, you could buy that thing I'm sure, something of equal quality for \$150.00 in somebody's used pontoon lot but back in those days, they were virtually unheard of. And all of this stuff was fabricated either on campus by our students or faculty or by the Plant Service people. And that was also fun working with Plant Services because they were real craftsman in those days and they took great pride in the work that they did. And they kind of enjoyed doing something other than just the routine Plant Service kinds of things. So, they built us racks to hold our titration equipment and chests to carry them around to and from the lakes and things like that. But yeah, this was all done by faculty sitting around and saying, "Well, what's it gonna

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take to get this done without any noticeable outside resources.”

Christopher Butle: The early days of science and math were a bit fractious but then in the '70s, it matured and became a very strong unit. The other general opinion shared with that was you were primarily responsible for providing that leadership. But if that is the truth, what were the reasons for the fractiousness and how did that resolve and become such a strong department?

Jim Olson: Yeah, I think that the fractious nature of the Science and Math Division early on was caused by-- Well, the historical perspective is that trying to start science at the college level in the early '60s exactly coincided with when Sputnik was a big deal and the National Science Foundation was just coming into existence and money was flowing all over the place. And people with the kind of training that we were looking for as faculty members had their choice of positions. And getting started, all we were able to afford was a mathematics major and a biology major. And so chemistry was a minor. Physics was a minor. Geology was a course. Rod Briggs's term for it was 'Rocks for Jocks'. You had to have something for the football players. Well, it didn't work out that way. And the result was that to try to attract a faculty member and say all we have is a chemistry minor but we're working on getting it to a major. The faculty members look at say, "Well, 'pff', I got five other offers from a place that I don't have to go and help develop the curriculum." And so when we did get someone under those conditions they were either exceptionally good and Jim Tojus [ph?] would be an example of somebody that came. And he wanted to teach at this kind of a school and wasn't really worried about the fact that they didn't have a major right off the bat. Or they didn't get good offers from these other places and so you _____ out to be an okay place to come. So they kind of gave us two different qualities of faculty. And one of the things that I think I was able to do as an administrator was to try and walk the line; keep building people up and keep looking for more good faculty members and looking for ways to ease out some of the other ones. And the university was reasonably helpful in that regard. But the trick really was every time a new hire came along was to find the best possible person and not have to turn the position over three times before you finally found someone that you wanted to keep in tenure. And so looking for some of the characteristics, if you were recruiting someone from the University of Chicago, you had to watch out because we were nothing like the University of Chicago. The Science and Math Division was built on the backs of my background, my undergraduate experience was Concordia, Moorhead. Jim was St. Olaf. Joe Lateral was St. John's. Some of our other people were from other private schools; in fact the whole campus you could look at private schools in the State of Minnesota were kind of the backbone. And yeah, we want to do the same thing here, except it's gonna be a public school so it has some

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different parameters. The result was that if we brought a prospective faculty member in here, and they had never heard of a St. Olaf or a St. Thomas or a St. John's, that was one red flag. If all they did was complain about the lack of equipment or the space that they had to work in or the size of their office or something; and we didn't need any complainers. We weren't looking for prima donnas. We wanted people that were willing to go to work. And then one of my favorites was, inevitably, you'd take them out for dinner and in the process of going through the menu and they would make comments about how they really like fresh seafood. In my early days, being from the Midwest. I spent virtually all of my life in the Midwest, frozen seafood and fresh seafood, they're all about the same. And on one trip I was in Philadelphia and they had some seafood that had been I suppose caught a few hours earlier. And I notice there's quite a difference here. And so I quit using that thing about it's all the same and I discovered that if a faculty member was really hung-up on seafood, fresh seafood for whatever reason, forget it. Because they're never gonna be happy in Morris because the seafood is always gonna be frozen. Or if it's fresh, it's not fresh enough. And picking up on those little things, turned out to make a difference I think in terms of finding faculty members that came here that found the challenge that they were looking for. They could always find good students to work with. We never had to renege on that promise. We could always tell them, the students are gonna be willing to work and help and the faculty members responded.

Christopher Butle: You were listing things you looked for to tell if a faculty member might have the metal to survive here. Why is flexibility such an important value for a faculty person?

Jim Olson: Well, first of all, we always had limited numbers of faculty. One of the campus hallmarks was an independent study course that was always in the catalogue. And so if a student was interested in another study topic that we didn't have a specific course for, we had a mechanism to deliver that course if we had people that wanted to do it. And so faculty members had to be willing to step in and frequently that's how courses would get started. They would teach it as a directed study. You would catch on to the students. They would think this is a great course; more would want to take it. Also there was a-- can you teach an analytical course with only two instruments or something like that. And that would require flexibility. Faculty members would take students on field trips to the Twin Cities where they would actually use x-ray equipment or some of the other things that were available down there at the multi-million dollar level where we had stuff out here that was either functional or barely functional. So, having faculty that could think on their feet, decide what needed to get done, what kind of resources were available; turned out to be very important. And it was the kind of

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challenge that most of the faculty really enjoyed.

Christopher Butle: One of the earlier battles you had to kind of bolster the reputation and the rigor of the Science and Math Department had to do with math.

Jim Olson: Well, mathematics was always a challenge partly because the number of faculty members that we had. Faculty lines [ph?] in mathematics was always limited. And I think that was limited because administrators always said, "Well, if you have five biologists, you can't have more than five mathematicians." Or something like that. And a large fraction of the incoming freshman class every year, were oriented toward science or engineering. And in particular the early days, we made our reputation on incoming engineering students because they were very bright. They were always motivated. Frequently, they were too bright and too motivated to be engineers. And we got to the point where we would simply tell them, "You're not gonna be very happy as an engineer. You might want to consider doing physics or something else." The Physics Program was essentially built on kids that decided they didn't want to go in engineering school. But all of these students required mathematics. And they were at high enough level that we didn't have to do very much remedial math. There was always a section of college algebra, which is a polite name for high school math. But most of them could start out in calculus. And the Upper Division faculty in mathematics couldn't teach all the calculus and still the do the Upper Division stuff that was necessary. And particularly when Batina Blake [ph?] became the dean, I got along with her very well. She understood what our situation was. And so when the calculus sections would close, I would get a call from the registrar and I would go over to her office and we would start adding. Well, we could put two more in each one of these sections or three more in each one of these sections. Well, there'd get to a point where even my conscious wouldn't allow me to do that anymore. And so then I would start scrambling around and hire the wife of a faculty member to teach this course so that someone else could be released to teach that course. And we did a lot of finagling and juggling. Diane Lopez started here essentially, teaching calculus classes that were just overflows from other enrollments. So, but there was always this turnover and after getting the Diane Lopez types for a while, then you'd plead with the dean and she'd say okay, you can go and hire a temporary appointment. Well, a temporary person was a Masters level person that was looking for some teaching experience as they would move on and I would always explain to them that temporary means that at the end of this nine months, you don't owe us anything and we don't owe you anything. You're done. And if we're going to extend it, we'll let you know sometimes in March, April, May or maybe June. And some years, we had three or four of those temporary people teaching the lower level math. Well, those temporary people were by and large pretty

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could and they could teach some of the Upper Division stuff. The Upper Division math teachers, we had trouble finding PhDs that wanted to do that kind of-- teach on this kind of a campus. They wanted to teach the plum math course. So there was always some competition. To a large extent, it was a matter of finding people that were qualified to become tenured in mathematics. And so math was actually the last discipline to finally break in and start coming through, producing enough PhDs at the graduate level nationwide to give us people like the Dave Roberts [ph?] and things like that could come in and really make a big difference for us.

Christopher Butle: This University has always been very responsive to student demands. To agree with that?

Jim Olson: Oh absolutely. The physics was a classic example. It was quite a number of years of students transferring into the Institute of Technology, which was in those days, that was the elite program on the Twin Cities campus. Students would transfer down there and their grade point averages would inevitably go up when they got to the Twin Cities. The people in Minneapolis were quite impressed by that. Here these kids from Morris would come in and they would know how to do all this stuff. They could do the differential equations and that sort of thing. Let's see. I think geology would be an example of where there was student demand for it. The geology courses were put in because it was a legitimate part of a general education program. And it was generally 'pooh-poohed' around here because there's no geology anyway. You can just go and look and you can see the horizon and that's all. But we got people in here like Jim Van Elstein [ph?] and Johnny Brower [ph?] who preceded I guess Peter Weiland [ph?]. But these people made it exciting. They made it interesting for the students. The students responded and lo and behold it took a while but we finally got a geology major that was and I think still is a very respectable major with a lot of research money and a lot of interesting projects going on. What I see now is with the sustainability issues they're doing right now, changing curriculum around here is not easy. Let me tell you. But the sustainability is moving in that direction. Computer Science was one of the classic examples of when computers first came out, some of my colleagues, particularly with Humanities where this was not going to be a vocational program where you taught kids how to program. And I knew that this was going to be a big challenge. Well, when we finally did get to the point of having a grant and having the courses and the faculty to teach a computer science major, it was quite a debate but mostly it was a matter of educating. My colleagues on the other side of the campus felt that yes, computer science as they understood the term, was punching a punch of cards and programming a computer. The computer science people would say, "No, it's logic. It is mathematical. It's a highly detailed and mathematically oriented science that is way beyond just

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plugging numbers into a computer. And we will not teach computer programming.” Well, it turns out that we did. We taught computer programming in an evening course; continuing ed course because a lot of people needed FORTRAN. We never taught Cobalt although I think somebody over in the social science taught Cobalt for a while in the evening program. But our computer science faculty typically would say-- I remember when we were on the quarter system, at the end of the fall quarter, the instructor said, “Okay.” I think it was data structures. “Next quarter, we’re gonna be using a different-- We’re gonna go from C to C+ or from FORTRAN to C or something like that.” I said, “You better buy a book and learn the language because that’s what we’ll be using next quarter.” And they did. The students didn’t have any problem with that but it turned out to be a very rigorous program. But it was very challenging to get that installed into the curriculum.

<Crew talk>

Jim Olson: That was one of the interesting facets of Rod Briggs was that he was a little bit concerned. Well, first of all, as a campus, we didn’t have any traditions. It was a brand new campus. So, he’s the one that wheeled out those beanies that said ‘64’ on it. And remember, at the first faculty meeting, he showed up wearing one of these beanies and you could see some of these people wondering what are we getting ourselves in for with this guy. But he felt very strongly that you had to impose those things. On Louie’s Lower Level, we had to have a place, a campus hangout place. And so he coined that term and several people tried to change it to something else but he liked that alliteration and it stayed Louie’s Lower Level as long as Rod Briggs was around here, regardless of who was in charge of the food service. I remember, I don’t know if it was in a conversation with Rod or if it was at a faculty meeting or what, but there weren’t any panty raids. And any respectable campus should have some kind of a panty raid. Well, it didn’t take long before they came forth with a panty raid, much to the dismay of the women that were still running the residence halls. At least when the first one came about, they were still from the Ag School and they were pretty straight-faced. And they were really upset by this panty raid thing that was going on in the campus. But Rod, he felt some underlying satisfaction that we were kind of coming of age. One of the things that I vividly recall was it a musical? Hair? I never even saw it so I’m not one to talk much about it. But that had this great reputation. It had the nude scene. And that was-- somebody had put together a traveling troupe of Hair and it was gonna appear here at UMM. And in those days, the only venue for it was the gym that got torn down when we built Science IV. And the word got out that Hair was gonna be playing on the campus. And oh man, the city was all up in arms about that. Are we gonna allow that? And I don’t recall exactly how much of a controversy this was

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nationwide. But I know that boy, here in the micro chasm of Morris, this was a big deal. So, I can about guess, some of the city fathers approached Rod and said, "We aren't gonna have this kind of stuff on the campus." And Rod in no uncertain terms told them, "You aren't gonna mess with that at all. Whatever they do is gonna go on. It's gonna be art. It's gonna be okay. The students will behave themselves." And I presume all that happened but that was kind of a big deal of Rod. And it wasn't the only time but Rod straightening out the local community about-- you may have gotten this college started and you helped finance it and did the politics behind it; but as a Liberal Arts College, there's some things that are gonna happen here that you may not be very happy with, but they're gonna happen anyway. Another thing that Rod was quite emphatic about was we were not gonna train secretaries on this campus. That was one of the things that downtown-- yeah, we're gonna have these college trained secretaries. And Rod informed them in very blunt language, "We're not gonna train secretaries that you're gonna pay \$3.00." Or whatever the prevailing minimum wage was back in those days. Three dollars an hour for a college trained secretary. That isn't gonna happen. That's not what you do at Liberal Arts Colleges. Rod was very blunt and in a way, he protected-- Since in the '60s, most of the faculty was so young. I was so green. I didn't have a clue what was going on. And Rod, he pretty much kept me out of any of those kinds of controversies. I never had to address them at all. If I went to a Lion's Club meeting or I went to the barbershop and somebody challenged me, all I had to do was say, "Well, just check with Dean Briggs because he'll straighten you out on that." That was all I had to do. So, there was never any spillover of any of those controversies that I was aware of. Now maybe other faculty members had different experiences but I found that all of the protesting things that were going on. There were some sit ins and things like that. I do recall those. But the Science and Math Division were pretty much so naïve and so intent on their work that they were carrying things on no matter what happened on the rest of the campus. Have people talked to Batina <inaudible>?

Christopher Butle: I have a couple of times. She hasn't attended. Her coming here is impossible.

Jim Olson: Because Batina and Tom Mahoney-- well, Vicander would tell you this. Batina and Tom Mahoney essentially put UMM on the map. They with that Title VI or Title IV grant.

Christopher Butle: Title III.

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Jim Olson: It's a Roman numeral anyway. And Tom Mahoney took the proposal into Immal [ph?] who had to sign it and Jack was reluctant to sign it because Jack really didn't have much of a clue about stuff like that. And Tom said, "I'm not leaving your office until you sign." So, Jack finally said, "Oh the hell with it." And signed it. And that brought in consultants that got us-- from Michigan in particular, that got us started on the-- not Newsweek. But whatever--

Christopher Butle: Either Forbes or Money.

Jim Olson: Forbes, Money but then there was also the one that does the--

Christopher Butle: Kiplinger's.

Jim Olson: Kiplinger's? Okay. Whatever has the best top ten universities or something like that.

Christopher Butle: Oh, US News and World Report.

Jim Olson: US News. That was the ultimate one. And from Vicander's standpoint, from then on, recruiting was a matter of keeping them away from the doors rather than bringing them in the doors for several years. And that all goes back to Batina and Tom working that whole thing out. So, it would be fun to get her version of that story.

Christopher Butle: We are. Probably some time in January.

Jim Olson: That's good. That's good. Oh, that's great, that's great. Batina was an ideal dean for this campus I would say. She had an understanding of what a Liberal Arts College was supposed to be like. I think she also had a good understanding of the extremes of what you could have for faculty members and still be considered a Liberal Arts College. She had more of a soft spot for athletics than anybody in the Wheel House at that time. She is the first person that I ever heard explain to the campus what Liberal Arts literally meant. And she had the ability to keep people in meetings long enough until things finally started to resolve themselves in terms of issues. She wasn't particularly good with columns in numbers and spreadsheets. She wasn't a budget

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person very much. And I wasn't either but I had Audrey Ross who was-- Have you talked to Audrey?

Christopher Butle: No I haven't.

Jim Olson: She's retired and I don't think her health is very good. But she was the accounts executive that I had or senior account clerk or something like that. She kept the books for the Science and Math Division. She was the only one for a while that knew what the money situation was on the whole campus because she was always tracking and always doing stuff. Well, with Audrey at my side, then I could go and talk to Batina about anything financial and I knew I was right. And Batina would always go along with me. And so I could talk Batina into temporary faculty because I could show how many students were involved, what was gonna cost to run the course; all this stuff. And I could always convince Batina of that. And Batina had a way-- she had the confidence of Jack. That that was really a good working team. And when Jack retired, you could see that things were gonna take a while for them to get put back together again. And I'm sure as soon as Jack retired, Batina started thinking about what she was gonna be doing. But yeah, she brought leadership characteristics that I know some of my colleagues would argue with. They would say no. But it was a subtle form of leadership that said what are our goals. And on this campus, that was easy. The faculty can fight like cats and dogs over all kinds of trivial junk. But you say, "Okay, what's our purpose out here?" We're gonna be a Liberal Arts College in the public sector. Everybody will get on board with that. And I don't think that's changed since I retired. And she picked up on that the first day she was on the campus. She made that worked to her advantage all the way through. She was very good at that kind of thing. And she recognized the fact that if you're a dean of a college of this size, you're never gonna have everybody on your side but make sure that the people that are against you are against you for the right reasons. And I think she was incredibly successful. I don't think we could have pulled this thing off without her insight and her vision of how this whole thing is supposed to work. She really-- she offered a lot. And I got a phone call from Don Spring during the interview process. And he called me up one night at home, which is very rare for Don. He said, "Well, I'm not gonna get the candidate that I want, but who do you want to become the dean?" And I thought-- and again, I was pretty naïve. I didn't know quite what to say. I hadn't really been impressed by any of the dean candidates. And I can't remember who the rest of them were. But anyway, Batina ended up getting the job and I found out later that she was the candidate that Don had ranked the lowest. He thought that she was probably the poorest choice and I have no idea exactly why. I never bothered to find out. But I think that she-- and you could tell there was some spin. She was told when she came here that you're gonna

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have the biggest trouble with the Science and Math Division because all they can do is fight amongst themselves and they're a bunch of whatever. And the Humanities Division is just gonna be a piece of cake. And she got here, and it was just exactly the opposite. She had nothing but headaches with her Humanities colleagues and we managed to keep things moving reasonably well in the Science Division. So, I think I was able to make her life a little bit easier and she in turn made my life a whole lot easier. I respected and admired that woman from day number one and really enjoyed working for her.

End of OlsonJim.mp3