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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: June 12, 2007

Interviewer: Lewis Shupe
Professor Emeritus, Department of Communication

Interviewee: Marc Low
Professor Emeritus, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

LS: I am Lewis Shupe, Professor Emeritus from the Department of Communication at Wright State University. Today is June 12, 2007, and I am interviewing Dr. Marc Low, Professor Emeritus from the Department of Mathematics. Marc, thank you for having this interview with us. Would you start by sharing with us a bit about your background- where you came from and when you first experienced Wright State?

ML: Okay. I was born into academe. My father was the librarian at Oklahoma State University, and he moved there in 1940 to become the librarian there, and I took my Bachelors and Masters Degree at Oklahoma State University. Then, I was looking for a place to work on a PhD. I was interested in number theory, and so the University of Illinois had a man that agreed to be a mentor for me, and so I went to the University of Illinois with my wife, who was also working on finishing her PhD in statistics. So, at the University of Illinois I met Bob Dixon. We became friends there, he was an instructor there at Illinois, and in 1964 I was finishing up my PhD, and Bob had just been hired by Ohio State to head up the Mathematics Department at the Dayton Campus of Ohio State and Miami. So, he approached me and my wife, and asked us if we would be interested in an appointment at the Dayton campus for a couple of years until we decided where we wanted to go. This was attractive to us because Ohio did not have any nepotism laws, and since we would be in the same department, that was important to us. So we accepted his offer, and so my wife, Leone, and I were hired by Bob Dixon to be faculty members in the Department of Mathematics at that time.

LS: How did he describe the new campus at Wright State?

ML: The Dayton Campus of Ohio State and Miami University. So we agreed to come here, and we came in 1964. As far as I know, Bob Dixon was the first person hired, he was certainly the first person hired in the Mathematics Department, and he was hired as the chair. So we came here in 1964, there were six of us in the Mathematics Department, including Al Smith, and all six of us stayed here, Al Smith and Leone and myself, we all three stayed at Wright State and retired from Wright State. We were rather unusual in the sense that we were hired by a university, and we spent our entire professional careers at

that place. We had different jobs during that time, but we stayed at the same place for our entire professional careers. Our first experience with the Dayton Campus was we came here, and we saw one building in the middle of a cornfield. That one building was Oelman Hall, and what was the administrative wing of Oelman Hall...

LS: Allyn Hall, wasn't it?

ML: I'm sorry, Allyn Hall. The administrative wing of Allyn Hall at that time was where the biology laboratories were, and at that time, we were pressed into duty as being registrar and enrolling students and all that sort of thing because they didn't really have anybody. Our first class of students were not the best students in the world, you know, I'd look at a transcript of maybe a C or a D average of the students, but we enrolled our first student body in 1964.

LS: Was it difficult for you to come here, leaving the University of Illinois and coming to such a new campus?

ML: No, as a matter of fact it was exciting in many ways. Because we thought that, here we were, we were coming to a new university, [and] we could do kind of what we wanted to do. We weren't bound by the strictures, the things, the traditions that had grown up in other universities. So, we could do what we wanted to do, we could be different; we weren't bound to be what traditional universities were at that time. Years later, when I looked back at those formative years, I saw that what we did, in fact, was very similar to what other universities had done at that time, like at the University of Illinois where I was, and I thought about that later and realized that was because that was really about the most efficient way to run a university, the way they were doing it. In universities, you're constrained by your finances. You have a pot of money, so your objective is to do the best possible job that you can do with that amount of money. Later on when I was dean, I would talk to my chairs, and all my chairs would say, "Give me more money and I'll do a better job", and they were all true. But there wasn't more money to go around, so you had to do the best with the monies that were available. So that was how you operated and that's why, eventually, we came to having graduate program graduate students, having graduate students teach courses and be assistants because that was the most economical way to teach large numbers of students.

LS: When you came here, who was the chief administrator?

ML: Well, my chief administrator was Bob Dixon. But above Bob, I'm trying to think, we had a man from Ohio State that was essentially the Ohio State part of it...

LS: Dr. Moulton?

ML: No, it was not Moulton. It was... I'm trying to think who it was. Maybe it was Moulton... he was the vice-President at Ohio State for outreach programs, for off campus programs, and he had a theory. He hired us to start on July 1, even though we didn't start teaching, of course, until the fall quarter, we started on trimesters at that time. That

allowed us to get a paycheck before we actually came to campus, so that was nice. I was hired as an instructor in mathematics at a salary of \$8,000 (laughs). I was hired as an instructor because I had not received my PhD yet, and the following year when I got my PhD, they promoted me to Assistant Professor, so I was assistant professor in the Mathematics Department. There were six of us in 1964, and we hired another six in 1965, so we had a fairly large faculty for a small campus at that time. We were hired through Ohio State and we were technically Ohio State faculty members. At one point I was up at Ohio State and somebody introduced me to the chair of the Ohio State Mathematics Department as one of his faculty members, and he looked at me like they were crazy. Because he didn't realize that technically we were Ohio State faculty members. I got something in the mail as an Ohio State faculty member that said that if I wanted to, I could buy season tickets to the football games and all this, and I said, "Who wants that? Jeez, Ohio State is a long ways away". I talked to a banker later on here, and I told him about this, and he said, "My God! I would kill for a chance to get Ohio State tickets!" So I didn't know what I had thrown away, the opportunity I had.

LS: It's too bad you don't have them now.

ML: That's right. So that was my benefit of being an Ohio State faculty member. Now, Moulton had a vision for us, he wanted for us to be as good as we could be, so as a result, new faculty were hired, like myself. On the Miami side, it seemed like they did not have the same kind of philosophy. It seemed like their philosophy was, "Well, if we're interested in somebody but he's not good enough for Miami, maybe they can go up here to the Dayton Campus". So it looked like, if you'll pardon the expression, they were trying to staff the campus with their re-treads. Over the years, I got the impression that Miami was a very reluctant partner in this consortium of Ohio State and Miami. They really didn't want us to succeed, because I think they were concerned that being so close to Miami that we could infringe on their territory, if you will. But the people who came here and who were hired here on the Miami side in that first year, we were all together in Allyn Hall, we were all on the fourth floor of Allyn Hall. That was where we were, it was 1964 and 1965, and I was a hawk and all of the Miami faculty were all doves, so we could get into some nice, violent arguments up there. But it was lots of fun, because we were mixing with all of the faculty, all of the faculty were up there, and so we mixed with all of them. We were all very dedicated to our jobs, and that was one of the things that I've observed at Wright State over the years; that we had very few "deadwood" faculty. All of the faculty, it seemed like, were really interested in doing the best job that they could, so they were really interested in going forward and making this the best place that we could be. Our original philosophy was that we would not be a publish and perish school; we would be a school that would emphasize teaching and research, and teaching would be as important as the research, and we kept up that philosophy. We were proud of it and we kept it up. We have evolved more now, to more teaching and research, but the original plan, again, this was one of the things that we felt we could do as a new school; we weren't bound by the traditions of other schools. So, we were not a publish and perish school.

LS: When did you meet Fred White?

ML: I met Fred White that first year. I had very little interaction with him, I just met him a few times. I met him and I liked him, I enjoyed his company very much, but, like I said, we weren't around him very much. You know, as essentially "junior" faculty members, we just kind of did our thing. We taught, we tried to be as good as we could for our students, and so we interacted in our own, small circle. So we had little interaction with the administrators as a whole at that point.

LS: Tell us about the students that first two or three years.

ML: Well, to be honest, they were bad. They were students who often could not get into anyplace else, and as I said, as I looked at these transcripts and I would see a C minus average or a D average- we admitted them, of course, because they had degrees, we admitted everybody that had a high school diploma- but the students were not of a good quality those first few years. Of course, the majority of them left for one reason or another because they simply weren't college material, but they had an opportunity, and that was something that we gave the students, all of the students had an opportunity to succeed. Many of them did not, but quite a few of them did, and we would nurture those through.

LS: When did you become chairperson of mathematics?

ML: Never. I was never the chair of mathematics.

LS: Oh, I thought you were.

ML: No. Carl Maneri, [pause], we went through a succession of chairs because, [pause], Bob Dixon was chair and Bob Dixon had a love-hate relationship with administration. He liked it, administration, he was very good at it, but he was also very frustrated with it, it gave him ulcers, and so after a period of time, he had to step down. So, we went through a variety of our faculty members as chairs. Krishan Gorowara was, [pause], Carl Maneri was chair, and Carl Maneri brought me into the chair's office to work as a student counselor, student advisor, with scheduling, so that was my first taste of administration. I'm not sure I even had a formal title, I was just there doing it, and teaching courses. So, we were in our formative years, we were the Mathematics Department, its primary mission was a service department to the other departments for their mathematical needs. The Biology Department had just hired- this was around 1968- they had just hired a new chair, Brian Hutchings. The Biology Department met with the Mathematics Department, and had a talk about the requirements that should be for the biology students. They were very concerned that we would try and impose too many hours on them, because they felt they couldn't give us all the hours that we wanted. So, I had proposed that instead of taking algebra, trigonometry and some calculus that they would be better served by having some statistics courses, so instead of taking calculus they could take some statistics courses. The Mathematics Department was teaching statistics courses, Leone had her PhD in statistics, she was teaching the statistics courses for the department, and we had others who had backgrounds who could teach statistics. So it was kind of a default thing, we were teaching statistics because we had people who had backgrounds

who were trained in statistics, to teach the courses. So, we reached a suitable compromise with the Biology Department, they could either take calculus or they could take statistics as another mathematics course. This brought me to the attention, I think, of Brian Hutchings, who was the chair of biology. I had another encounter with Brian later on. We had an agreement with the Biology Department, we were now on the 4th floor of Fawcett Hall, I believe. We had gone through various stages and were now on the 4th floor of Fawcett Hall, and we had an agreement that we could use some offices in Oelman Hall for our graduate assistants, but that if they hired new faculty members, then we would have to vacate them and get them out. I remember he called me one day, and he reminded me of the agreement. Our chair, Dr. Maneri, was out of town at that time, and he said, "We have a faculty member coming in and so we need one of these offices", and I said, "I'll get our people together and we'll get them out tomorrow", and we did. So those were about the two interactions I had with Brian Hutchings.

LS: Timeline, when was that, approximately?

ML: That was approximately '68, '69, around there. In 1971, Conley, [Robert], had been dean of the College of Science and Mathematics. At that time, it was the College of Science and Engineering; engineering was still a part of the college at that time. Also, they brought in nursing; nursing started as part of the College of Science and Engineering. So, Conley was the dean of the college, and then he moved on to start developing the medical school. At that time, Brian Hutchings had the title of associate dean for the college, and so they asked him to be the interim dean, and he said yes, he would take the job, but he wanted the chance to bring in his own staff. So, whatever that meant. So, he called me up and he said, "I'm going to be the acting dean, and I'd like you to work with me to be the assistant dean". Well, administration seemed to be kind of my thing that I was doing, so I agreed to become his assistant dean. Then, in I think it was 1972, he got hired as the permanent dean, after a search, and he kept me on as the assistant dean, and so I stayed on as the assistant dean under him. I worked under him for 11 years, first as assistant dean, and then associate dean. At that time I was splitting my duties, I was still in the Department of Mathematics, so I was half-time there and half-time in the Dean's Office. My expertise in the Dean's Office was finance, so I became the financial officer for the college.

LS: Take us to your other appointments until the time you retired, and then I'll bring you back to some early remembrances, okay?

ML: Okay. So, I was assistant dean under Dr. Hutchings, and then the associate dean under Hutchings. When Hutchings retired, they brought in John Rossmiller to serve as the acting dean, and at that time I told John, "You know, I serve at your pleasure. I'd be happy to resign and go back to the department if you want to bring in somebody else.", and he said no, so I stayed on with Rossmiller as associate dean. They hired him for two years as an interim person, and then they hired a mathematician as the permanent dean... why am I drawing a blank here...

LS: It will come back to you.

ML: It will come back to me. Anyway, I gave him the same option, that if he wanted to hire someone else, I was happy to leave. And I was, I was prepared to go back to the department, I loved teaching and I was prepared to go back to the department at any time, as a full time faculty member there. They said no. So, at this time, the college was breaking up, and nursing, I believe, had already split off as a separate unit, and engineering was getting ready to break off. So, engineering broke off, and-

LS: Timeline, when was that?

ML: That was when... I'm blanking on his name right now, that's when he was hired. So, let's see, that was about '83, '85, it was about 1985.

LS: It's kind of nice to have the timeline.

ML: Right. 1985 was when the College of Engineering was splitting off. Engineering and computer science split off, so we had to have a name for the college, and we named it Science and Mathematics. We had hired our new dean, who at that time was in Washington D.C. He was working for NSF on a one year appointment there, and he had been hired by the college. I called him up, and I said, "We're thinking about naming the college the College of Science and Mathematics. S and M. If you want to, you can get us, probably, to change the name, because it isn't set in stone at this point. So if you have some better name, this is the time to do it, because otherwise, once those names go in, it's very hard to change them later". But he said, "No, that was fine, science and mathematics", so we became the College of Science and Mathematics. The dean, then, of Engineering and Computer Science hired Dr. Brandenberry to be the dean of the new college, and Brandenberry had been the chair in the Department of Engineering, so I had worked with him. So, Jim [Brandenberry] said, "I want you to do our finances, too". So, he appointed me as associate dean of the engineering college, so I had a joint appointment in [the College of] Engineering, and the College of Science and Mathematics, so essentially I was doing the finances for both colleges. Dr. Hathaway was the provost at that time, and he opposed this appointment. He said, "You can't do both jobs; you've got to have a loyalty someplace.", but the two deans said, "We don't have any problem with this." So I stayed on as associate dean for both colleges. Dr. Millman, of course, was the dean at that time, the name I got hung up on. Dr. Millman stayed for five years, until 1990, and at that time he left to take a provost job. I was then hired to be the interim dean. They didn't like that title; Hathaway didn't like that title, so he said, "We're going to appoint you dean. It's just a one year appointment, but that's what your title is going to be", and I thought that was good thinking, because these titles of "acting" or "interim" or so forth, you know, so you have a title as dean as a one year appointment, that was fine. That was 1990. I stayed on as dean- they had various searches that never panned out, it seemed like- so I stayed on as dean until 1995, when I retired as dean. And then they brought me back for a year after I retired because they still hadn't found anybody to be the dean of the college, so I actually left in 1996.

LS: I remember the title of "dean" with you more than a rank within a specific department.

ML: Yes.

LS: Okay, let me take you back to some of the earlier times. What are a number of your personal memories, outside of the department, about Wright State?

ML: Like I said, my initial memory is one building in the middle of a cornfield. That's my image of the first year here at Wright State. My memories were of those first couple of years when we were all together in Allyn Hall on the fourth floor with all the faculty members; [it] was a revelation to me. If you think about a person who is working for their doctoral degree, as I was at the University of Illinois, all I was surrounded by other mathematics students. That was my life, that was my interaction; with mathematics students. These other students- my colleagues at that time, the faculty I dealt with at Illinois, the graduate students I dealt with at Illinois- they were all mathematicians, that was their being. So when I came here to Wright State, I found out there were actually other people in the world besides mathematicians. And I enjoyed their company; the historians and the English faculty. They had different points of view than I did, and so I enjoyed their company very much. Like I said, it was kind of a revelation. It was also a revelation because of the students. Again, when you think about your colleagues, your colleagues are all Ph.D. students or faculty members; these are not average people, they are not representative of the student body as a whole. Now at Illinois, I had been teaching since I was a sophomore in college. At Oklahoma State, I taught classes there, I taught as an undergraduate assistant, [and] I taught as a graduate assistant there. I went to Illinois, I taught at Illinois as a graduate assistant four of my five years there, and then, of course, when I came to Wright State I taught continuously. So I was familiar with teaching undergraduates and so forth, but the undergraduates that we had in our first couple of years here at Wright State were not of the caliber of other students. My observation was that when they got to be juniors here at Wright State, they had been weeded out enough so they were kind of the equivalent of juniors at other universities. But it took them that long to kind of do that weeding out process, and by the time they graduated here at Wright State, I felt they were fairly comparable to students that were graduating at other universities, by the time they actually graduated.

LS: So you did a good job with them.

ML: We did a good job with them, yes. We weeded out the students that really just weren't capable of making it, which is sometimes a painful process. I remember I was teaching an algebra course, and a student came up to me and said he was going to have to drop the course because he wasn't doing well, he couldn't hack it and he was going to have to drop it. So he dropped it, and the next day he got drafted, because he fell below the twelve hours and was no longer a full time student, so he got drafted. The memory in 1970 of Kent State was a big thing. It was a big memory for me that year because, first of all, I was shocked at the attitude that the townspeople had. You know, they were thinking, "Those kids probably deserved it, those hippies", and that wasn't us at all. The mood of the times at that time was kind of frightening for us.

LS: Do you have any memories about some of the extra-curricular activities of the students?

ML: Very little, because there were very little extra-curricular activities of the students. As a commuter campus, you know, we had no dormitories at that time so it was strictly a commuter campus. So the students came and they left, and there was little interaction between them, and little interaction between us and the students, except for the times when they would come in to our office. But there were no kind of extra-curricular, um, parties or anything for the students, so there wasn't much, not that I remember.

LS: I'm going to ask you a question that you may or may not have any knowledge about. Tell us about football, when that issue came up. Do you have any remembrances of that?

ML: Oh, I have lots of remembrances of that. Every time the question of football came up- now, we were supporters of athletics- but every time the mention of football came up, we said, "Praise God we don't have football, praise God we don't have football". When I started getting into finances, one of the things I did was I looked to see what happened, and at that time, this was in the early '70's, Ohio State was self-sufficient in financing their athletic programs, and every other university in the state subsidized football at least two million dollars a year, that was the minimum that it cost to have football programs. When I learned that, I was a strong advocate of "no football", never have football, because it just took money away from academic programs.

LS: Did you get any resistance to that attitude?

ML: No, that was a commonplace attitude. When Mulhollan was hired, if he wanted to scare us a little bit, he would threaten to bring in football, but the attitude of everybody was, "Thank God we don't have football". Now, the school's that do have football- I talked to my father about it, my father, like I said, was a librarian at Oklahoma State University. And I'll just interject this, when he retired they named the library building after him, and so it's the Edmund Low Library at Oklahoma State. I learned a lot of things about academe from him that I carried forward with me, but he said that football is often, in a campus with a lot of resident population, was kind of a unifying force for the students. So I did have some positive values there, even though for most schools it's a financial drain, on most schools, and it still is today. So we were happy that we did not have the albatross of football around our necks. It was enough, we felt, for basketball and the Nutter Center. But the faculty I dealt with, as far as I know, all supported the idea of not having football and we vigorously resisted it whenever an administrator made some noises about having football. In the first master plan of Wright State, the first drawings they made of the campus, they had this huge campus with a football stadium out there, and we were so pleased that it never came to pass for that football stadium.

LS: That's in the lobby of the library right now. As you walk out, look at that.

ML: I will, I will.

LS: If you could in one word talk about Wright State when you came here, just one word, what would you say?

ML: Exciting. The thrill we had of starting a new university and doing the things that we wanted to do was exciting for us, and the university, the way it grew, the administration by and large let us grow the way we wanted to. So, we were pleased that we felt a minimum of interference from the top down.

LS: What would one word be today about Wright State?

ML: Well, I'd like to say that Wright State has matured over the years, and I still think that we did more exciting and innovating things here than other universities did, the more established universities did, over the years. It seemed to us that we were always ahead of the curve in many ways here, so I think that we have matured as a university and become really one of the best universities in Ohio.

LS: That's nice. Just as summary, what was the most unique experience you've had at Wright State, of all of your years? That may be hard to describe.

ML: Yeah, I'd have to think about that a minute. [Long pause]. Most unique thing...

LS: In your experience.

ML: ... in my experience. [Long pause] I don't know, I'll have to think about that, because...

LS: You can always tell us at a later date.

ML: I can always tell you at a later date. Because there were so many unique things, to single out one that would be the most unique, I'd have to kind of think about it.

LS: If we could go back and do it over, what is something you would have done differently in your tenure here?

ML: Well, if you want to go back that far, what I would have done when I was at Oklahoma State University, I would have taken a course in architecture. [Laughs]

LS: Explain that a little further.

ML: Well, because Oklahoma State had a very fine architecture school, and as I got into administration one of the things that we were always doing was building. We were building buildings, we were constantly remodeling, so knowing some basic things about architecture would have been a great help, because inevitably you get involved in this so being able to speak the language a little bit would have been more helpful. As it was, we were kind of self taught about how to do these things.

LS: Okay, is there anything you would like to talk about that we haven't asked a specific question?

ML: Well, in the early days, the mathematics department had hired a faculty member, we hired him sight unseen from the University of California, Berkeley. Now, Berkeley was a good school, so you think how was Wright State- at this time we were still not even an independent campus yet- able to hire this person, and we found out. It was that he was a hippie, and his wife was even more of a hippie. His name was Dupre (sp?), and Dupre was an interesting faculty member for us. All of the rest of us were traditional students, [from] traditional universities and so forth, and as Gerry Meike put it, on a yardstick, or as an alphabet from A to Z, the rest of the faculty were from M to N, that's where we were, and Dupre was out at Z. He was quite a character, and one day he had shown to his students in this mathematics class a film of the Columbia riots at that time. So in a departmental meeting, I asked him, "What was the relevance of the Columbia riots to mathematics?", and he said, "Well, they were rioting at the mathematics building". [Laughs] He was an interesting character.

LS: Well listen Marc, thank you for interviewing with us today, and if you have other memories that pop up, we'll be happy to add an addendum to this.

ML: Alright, it was my pleasure to be here and reminisce a little bit about it. Yes, as I think about it, there are many stories that I could tell. Because it was interesting, in my position as associate dean and later as dean, I was far enough from the action that I wasn't directly involved but yet I was close enough that I could see all the kind of things going in and out of the administration, so it provided kind of an interesting viewpoint there.

LS: Now those are some of the viewpoints we'd like to hear at another time, okay?

ML: At another time, right. But even so, I guess I had formed a reputation- let me tell you one story. Kegerreis was president and Beljan was provost, and I was just in the time of courting my present wife, Sandy. The deans were having a meeting on campus- the deans from around the state had meetings at all the campuses, and it was Wright State's turn- and as for the entertainment, we took them to see a play, I think "Private Lives" was playing at the time in the theatre here. We invited the provost and the president to come to the play, we didn't think they would, but we were surprised they showed up. So they showed up and we were all sitting together. So it was intermission, and Sandy and I were getting up and we had to pass by Dr. Kegerreis. So I stopped and introduced them, he and his wife, and he said to Sandy, "Don't believe anything that he tells you about me". [Laughs] So we went on and then we came to Dr. Bellman and I introduced him to Sandy, and Bellman said, "Don't believe anything Marc tells you about me". [Laughs] I mean, what was I doing there? I didn't even know they knew my name, much less having a reputation of being a loud mouth. But I heard later that Al Smith had been warned that he should be careful about going to lunch with me because I was a bad influence on people.

LS: Well Marc, that was an enjoyable interview with you. Thank you, and I'm sure that we will add some other memories that you would like to share with us.

ML: I certainly would.

LS: Thanks.

ML: Thank you.