

RICHARD SULLIVAN

March 23, 2000

Jeff Charnley,  
interviewer

**Charnley:** Today is Thursday, March 23, the year 2000. We're here in East Lansing. I am Jeff Charnley interviewing Dr. Richard Sullivan for the MSU [Michigan State University] Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution to be commemorated in the year 2005. As you can see, Dr. Sullivan, we're taping this interview today. Do you give us permission to tape?

**Sullivan:** Right.

**Charnley:** I'd like to start first with a little bit about your general background, education and professional background. Where were you born?

**Sullivan:** I was born in Nebraska. Doniphan, Nebraska, in 1921. So I've been around for some time. I went to the University of Nebraska as an undergraduate, and then I was in the [Army] Air Corps for four years during World War II. Then I went to the University of Illinois and got a master's and Ph.D. My first teaching job was in 1949 at Northeast Missouri State College, a teachers college in Kirksville, Missouri. In '54, I came to Michigan State. Been here since.

**Charnley:** What year did you graduate with your bachelor's degree?

**Sullivan:** In '42.

**Charnley:** And then you went directly into the--

**Sullivan:** Directly into the Army, and was in the Army until '46.

**Charnley:** Did you serve overseas?

**Sullivan:** No, I didn't. I served in the United States all the time.

**Charnley:** So after the war was over and you got out of the service, did you use the GI Bill?

**Sullivan:** Yes, I did. I went directly out of the service into the University of Illinois graduate program.

**Charnley:** What was the University of Illinois like at that time in graduate work?

**Sullivan:** Well, it was a very good university, at least I thought it was. It had a very strong history department, which was particularly attractive. I had been stationed at Chanook Field which is right next door to Urbana, so I got involved with people there before I was out of the Army. So I got acquainted with some of the teachers and professors. One particular one I was very attracted to because I was in medieval history, and he was interested in my working with him. So that's how I got involved with the University of Illinois.

**Charnley:** What sparked your interest in medieval history?

**Sullivan:** Well, I guess it was a teacher I had when I was an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska who got me very excited. I was interested in history when I went to the University of Nebraska, but this particular teacher particularly excited me. So I followed up that. I was lucky in high school. I went to a very small and very limited high school, but I learned to read Latin while I was there. So when I got to University of Nebraska, medievalists

were interested in me because I could read Latin, one of the few people around that could. So this was a kind of a fluke in my life. It in a sense determined what my career turned out to be.

**Charnley:** Who did you study with at the University of Illinois?

**Sullivan:** Johns Ottigar [phonetic] was his name. He later became dean at the University of Michigan and president of the University of Washington for many years.

**Charnley:** Did your dissertation work require any travel, overseas study, or anything like that?

**Sullivan:** No. I did my dissertation really out of public sources. But I did go to Europe immediately. I won a fellowship. When I finished my degree, I went to Europe for six months, kind of seeing medieval sights and doing some wrap-up ends on my dissertation. But it was already finished, and my degree had been awarded at that time.

**Charnley:** On that first trip to Europe, what do you remember? What stands out most about that trip?

**Sullivan:** I guess I really felt for the first time how much greater impact the war was on Europeans than it was on we Americans. Although many people were there, but I wasn't. But Europe was still a very depressed place. There was a shortage of food, shortage of fuel, almost anything you can think of. So that impressed me. But just to be in Europe after growing up in Nebraska, that was what really impressed me, I guess. I was able to travel around a good bit. I went all over Europe, really, during that six months. Got to see a lot of things that I'd read about over the years. Now I got to see them at first sight.

**Charnley:** What year was that?

**Sullivan:** In '49. I got my degree in March, the end of the first semester, in the spring of '49. Then I went to Europe for six months. Came back in the fall, took a job, had my first job.

**Charnley:** So then you were assistant professor.

**Sullivan:** Assistant professor, yes.

**Charnley:** At Southwest Missouri State?

**Sullivan:** Northeast Missouri. I was an assistant professor, but I was there five years and I got to be a full professor during that time.

**Charnley:** What courses were you teaching there?

**Sullivan:** Well, the big load was the Western Civ[ilization] course. I taught huge classes of that. But I also taught ancient and medieval history as a part of the regular history program.

**Charnley:** How did you first hear about MSU? Or how did you end up at Michigan State?

**Sullivan:** Well, a friend of mine came through Kirksville and said that there was an opening here, so I applied for it, which is how we used to get jobs, anyway. I guess my record looked good enough to somebody at least that I was invited to come for an interview, and ultimately was asked to take a job here.

**Charnley:** Who was the chair in history then?

**Sullivan:** Walter Fee.

**Charnley:** He had been at Michigan State for many, many years?

**Sullivan:** Yes. He came, oh, I suppose in the late twenties or early thirties.

**Charnley:** You succeeded him as chair?

**Sullivan:** As chair, yes.

**Charnley:** Although probably when he interviewed he, he didn't think he was interviewing his successor.

[Laughter]

**Sullivan:** I don't think that was in the books then, no.

**Charnley:** So it was 1954?

**Sullivan:** 1954.

**Charnley:** That you came to Michigan State. What were your first impressions when you came for your interview? What do you remember?

**Sullivan:** It was a big place, but I had been used to a big place at the University of Illinois. Although I hadn't taught at a big place, I knew what a big university was like. In some ways, it couldn't come up to the University of Illinois in library facilities and things of that sort. When I first came here, we were just getting starting to build a

library. We weren't even in the new building that we're in now. We were across the street where the museum is. Very small holdings. But the wonderful thing about Michigan State then was that the doors were open. You could buy what you wanted. You could order anything you wanted. Somehow there just seemed to be money every place in those days.

The history department was just building up. When I first came here, I taught both ancient and medieval history. Well, shortly after that we hired an ancient historian and then another medieval historian. So that's the kind of thing that was going on all over the campus then.

**Charnley:** So a lot of expansion within both the student body—

**Sullivan:** Yes. Student body was expanding, but everything else was expanding, too.

**Charnley:** What was the graduate program like when you first got here? How extensive was it?

**Sullivan:** It was not very extensive, no. A lot of people who really were involved in tracking the first graduate students came at about the same time I did or shortly before that. So a new crowd of people had come in with opportunities to do graduate work. I don't think those had existed before. Not that people were incompetent to do it, but it just was not part of the scene here then. Not part of the growth, you see.

**Charnley:** Who else was part of that cohort that came in about the same time you did?

**Sullivan:** Jack Garrity and Dick Yorson [phonetic] and Arthur Adams, Al Glick, Fred Williams.

**Charnley:** Paul Hart, or was here before?

**Sullivan:** Paul came a little later than that, yes. He came from Ohio State. He'd already established himself. He came here as a full professor. There was a lot of people who left in the interval who came through about that time, too.

So the department was growing in numbers, and, thus, likewise it was growing in opportunity to do graduate work. That's really what happened, I think. The university had decided it was going to support graduate work, and not only just a few disciplines like ag establishment or the education business. It decided it was going to be a full-time university. See, we got the Big Ten just about the same time I came here. It was in '55, I think. So, you know, you don't get in the Big Ten unless you're willing to have a graduate program. So those were all part of what was going on at that time.

**Charnley:** It sounds like for a faculty member, it was an exciting time.

**Sullivan:** It was an exciting time, it really was, yes. It's never been the same since in some ways. Once we began to succeed, as I think the department or the university did succeed in many ways in subsequent years, it got to be kind of old hat, all this sort of thing. But when you were in on it at the beginning, it was something.

**Charnley:** You arrived just the year before the university celebrated its centennial.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** I know we're focusing on 2005, it's part of the reason why we're doing these interviews, so you were here right at that time. Do you remember any of the activities that the history department was involved in?

**Sullivan:** Well, I knew Madison was writing his history. That was in connection with the centennial. But I really don't remember anything. I believe it was kind of a low-key observance of our anniversary, as I remember it now. Maybe I'm wrong. You may know more about that than I do.

**Charnley:** That is what several people have said. It was geared toward the book. The Big Ten accomplishment--

**Sullivan:** I think to many of us, the Big Ten accomplishment meant more than the hundred years in a lot of ways.

**Charnley:** Let's talk about your career and your work here in developing graduate studies, any ones that you had at that time. You were obviously an important influence in their life, in teaching. Who were some of those students that you had in the early years?

**Sullivan:** I remember many of them. I think the first one was a young man named Chip Morgan, William Morgan, who came here from the University of Toledo to study with me, apparently, for some reason or other. He was really my first Ph.D. Another one was Jim Walsh, who came about that same time. I think he was an undergraduate student here, and got acquainted with me in that respect. And then there begin to be several of them. For a while, I really had quite a group of graduate students.

**Charnley:** Do you because at any point the largest number that you had at one time?

**Sullivan:** I suppose it was probably in the late sixties, I must have had eight or ten students working on Ph.D.s about that time.

**Charnley:** Sounds like a lot of people.



**Sullivan:** Then I went into administration, and I began not to have as much time, although I continued to have students, but I didn't have as many as I did then, I think.

**Charnley:** So the range of courses you were teaching, were you teaching a survey course in Western Civ?

**Sullivan:** Yes. When I first came here, strangely enough, I taught Western Civ, I taught ancient history, I taught medieval history, and I taught American history one semester. That didn't last very long, because we were getting too many students and getting more and more faculty, but I did teach American history.

**Charnley:** Your Latin background didn't help much in American history. [Laughter]

**Sullivan:** No, it didn't. The first day I taught American history, some student wanted to know what bore they used in some rifle in a battle in the Civil War. I didn't even know. I had no idea what he was talking about.

**Charnley:** That's a Fred Williams question. [Laughter]

**Sullivan:** But this was the American history survey.

**Charnley:** The details. So the Western Civ, you were teaching that.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** In large classes?

**Sullivan:** Yes, we had large classes then. We had graduate assistants working with us. They were really run fairly large. We had large classes in ancient and medieval history, too, 100 to 120 students every term.

**Charnley:** Were those required courses?

**Sullivan:** No, they weren't.

**Charnley:** In different fields?

**Sullivan:** History was much more popular among students then, students not necessarily majoring in history, just taking history courses. Especially they were attracted to people who were good professors. So we had huge classes. Some of the undergraduate classes in history were really out of hand, almost.

**Charnley:** As you think about your experience, obviously at some point you were awarded the title of distinguished professor at the university.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** I think it's important, in talking with faculty, to ask them what do you consider your best teaching ability, or how did you deliver the history courses?

**Sullivan:** Well, I think that I was really best as a lecturer in big classes. I really do, I think. That's not a popular thing to say in a day when people don't talk about big classes and so forth, but I think I can do that best. Not everybody can do that. Not everybody needs to do it. It's just some people can, and some people can't. But I did fairly well in graduate classes, too. I could manage that.

**Charnley:** Seminar type of approach?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** In your early publishing and the link between your research that went on in the 1950s, what publishing were you working on?

**Sullivan:** The first publications I had was when I was at Northeast Missouri. Really they were work out of my dissertation. I published them as articles in some fairly prestigious medieval journals. I think that was one reason why I got a job here, because I had some publication record. I had some things in the mill at that time. So I got started there. It was kind of a struggle, because I had no libraries whatsoever there. I used to have to go to Urbana from Kirksville about four or five times a year to stock up on what I needed.

**Charnley:** What did you do when you came here? You had to build a library.

**Sullivan:** Well, we began to build a library. Yes, yes. It was just a matter of ordering books and getting them. That was not possible in Missouri, because they just were not a research university there. They didn't have the kind of money that it takes to build a library.

**Charnley:** Your first book, when was that published?

**Sullivan:** My first book was published in 1961, I believe it was. I got a Fulbright and Guggenheim in 1961, '62. While I was abroad, in Belgium, I finished a book on [unclear], which was published before I got back. Then, also in 1960, Professor Harrison--do you remember him, did you know him?

**Charnley:** I didn't know him. The co-author of your--

**Sullivan:** He and I did a Western Civ. book which was published, the first edition of that, in 1961.

**Charnley:** '61 was the first edition?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** Is that still in print?

**Sullivan:** I don't think it is anymore. It went through eight editions. It's still on sale. I still get royalty checks. Textbooks are kind of going out of business now because of electronic communications and so forth.

**Charnley:** In that period, in the later 1960s, did you see much difference in terms of the students in the sixties compared to when you first got here?

**Sullivan:** I believe it was then that I noticed students less interested in history than they had been. They were beginning to sense that, or beginning to talk like they sensed that the past didn't make any difference, that it was a burden on them, and so on and so forth. So there was kind of a turning against history. If you had to teach a course where students were required to take it, there were some courses, you got more and more resentment on the part of some students, or resistance on the part of students. So it became, for a while at least, a little bit unpleasant to teach history, although not intolerable, but just a little bit different.

Students begin to be more critical. They begin to want to define what they wanted more, and insist on getting it more. I'm not sure they knew what they wanted, but at least they acted like they knew what they wanted

and talked like they did. So teaching became more challenging in some ways. Some would say more difficult, but more challenging I would prefer to put it.

**Charnley:** Did you find students in the classroom making any connections with either what you were talking about with contemporary politics or the war in Vietnam or anything like that? Did you encounter that, or no?

**Sullivan:** Some of that, yes. Although I'd always tried in all my teaching to make sure that at least there was some reason for talking about this, in this modern world. Not just antiquarianism, but there was some reason, it just meant something in some way, so in that sense, I guess I always was trying to connect past and present in some way. But they wanted to connect it in a different way than I did.

**Charnley:** It was in this period you became history chair, right?

**Sullivan:** In '68, yes.

**Charnley:** In 1968. So you probably remember that year?

**Sullivan:** Yes. That and the next couple of years.

**Charnley:** How was it that you became chair? Professor Fee retired?

**Sullivan:** He retired, yes. The department went through a selection process, and I came out, I guess.

**Charnley:** What else do you remember was happening at that time? President [John A.] Hannah was obviously president when you were first here.

**Sullivan:** Well, President Hannah was beginning to be under siege by that time. Part of the trouble around here was complaints about his old-fashioned ways. I didn't agree with that, but that's what people were saying. Not only students, but a lot of faculty members were saying the same thing. There were probably more radicals on the faculty then than there were students, at least on this campus. I don't know about all campuses or not.

**Charnley:** More radical faculty.

**Sullivan:** I remember one of the first things that happened when I was chair, which would have been unthinkable earlier in my career, I guess, people refused to teach.

**Charnley:** Faculty members?

**Sullivan:** Yes, faculty members. That was their way of protesting. To me, that just seemed intolerable. But people had reasons, I guess.

**Charnley:** In the transition to Walter Adams and Clifton [Clifford R.] Wharton [Jr.], did you have any dealings with them as history chair at all?

**Sullivan:** I became dean the very same day, in fact, that Wharton became president. January 1st, 1970.

**Charnley:** So you weren't chair very long, in history?

**Sullivan:** No, I was only chair for, really, a year and a half, I guess.

**Charnley:** Do you remember who the dean was before?

**Sullivan:** Paul Varg. I succeeded him. He was the first dean of Arts and Letters. Arts and Letters is not very old.

**Charnley:** It was in a different organization.

**Sullivan:** It was in what they used to call Arts and Sciences, a huge, 110-department college.

**Charnley:** So you were the second in the string in that one?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** In terms of administration, what did you see as maybe one of your strengths as an administrator?

**Sullivan:** Well, at least I thought one of my strengths was I was a fairly good manager of money. I could keep track of it. So that won me some favor, in some people's eyes at least, that I always knew where the money was and didn't let people get away with it as much as they might have liked to. I hope at least that I listened to everybody that needed to be listened to, as part of administering.

I have a hunch, now that I look back on it, that some of my views about what education was and should be were maybe a little old-fashioned by that time. So maybe I was not forward-looking enough as dean. In a sense, I was kind of traditionalist in terms of educational policy. The code of honor that should govern the profession, and so forth. I think I was a little, as I say, old-fashioned in that respect.

**Charnley:** You saw a difference in the work ethic of the faculty, from your generation and from perhaps even newer faculty?

**Sullivan:** I wouldn't say that their work ethic was a matter of issue. I think it was where they placed their loyalty, if I may call it that. It seems to me that when I first came here, people thought about doing history on this little four square miles. By the time I was dean, more and more faculty members were interested in where they stood in the profession, somewhere outside, so that gave them priorities and interests and so forth, where they spent their energy, other than where I thought it should be spent or it once was spent.

**Charnley:** So the change in the profession going on at that time.

**Sullivan:** It wasn't just here, you know. This was happening all over, and it's still happening. I think that institutional loyalty is not very strong these times. We're not quite as bad as professional athletes, but normally if we got enough money involved in hiring people, they'd be running one place and another, just like they do now, you know. Free agents.

**Charnley:** That was one of the issues that came up in talking with Pauline Adams about how Walter Adams--this was one of his first jobs, and the loyalty issue to the institution, the whole concept. Because he could have gone everywhere.

**Sullivan:** Yes. I'm sure he would have had dozen opportunities, but didn't.

**Charnley:** In your case, were headhunters coming after you?



**Sullivan:** Yes, especially to administrative jobs. I was still relatively young then. But I always found it better here. I just was not interested. I was courteous, I would listen to people, but I was never very interested.

**Charnley:** So that's why you stayed?

**Sullivan:** I think I stayed because I liked it here and because they university treated me very well.

**Charnley:** In terms of being dean, the first provost you were working with as dean, do you remember?

**Sullivan:** The first provost was Larry [Lawrence L.] Boger.

**Charnley:** And you were here during, as you mentioned, just during the new administration of Cliff Wharton?

**Sullivan:** Cliff Wharton, yes.

**Charnley:** Did you have any dealings directly with him?

**Sullivan:** Well, yes, we did. We got to be fairly friendly on a personal basis with him. We got along very well with them. They got along very well with us. They were wonderful people in that respect. They were very hospitable.

Then, of course, we got involved in the building of the Wharton Center [for Performing Arts]. I was a part of that movement. That brought us together. I was a great admirer of Cliff Wharton, I think more than a lot of other people were.

**Charnley:** What would you say that he brought to this campus?

**Sullivan:** Well, I think he brought a kind of cosmopolitan flavor that perhaps was lacking in Hannah days, and I don't mean that to be in any way critical. It was just the way this university came into being and grew that made it somewhat parochial, I think, tied to kind of special interest in the state agricultural establishment. It did yeoman work in that respect. It was a real pioneering university in terms of community service and so forth, but it left kind of a rift in the university between that parochialism and an increasingly cosmopolitan faculty drawn into the place in years when I came and others began to come in. So there was a kind of tension in that respect.

I think Wharton, I don't know if he succeeded totally or not, but he tended at least to open the place up a little bit to outside influences that I think were good for the place. The idea of a Wharton Center, as I went through that matter, was really kind of ran against the grain on some people. It didn't seem like that's what we should be doing. Much more important was the Breslin [Student Events] Center, what became the Breslin Center. That was the kind of thing. Wharton, you know, stood up and began to put his money where his mouth was, that we need this particular kind of facility here to make this a big-time university. So it turned out, I think. That's kind of a symbol of what I think he stood for, this university.

**Charnley:** The issue of support for the arts. Obviously, you as dean of Arts and Letters, did you find either overt or covert opposition to that? Or maybe let's talk a little about where you see the role of humanities in undergraduate education. Let's start first with that.

**Sullivan:** Well, I think that by the time I came here, and certainly after I came here, there was really no question about the importance of the humanities defined in terms of traditional disciplines like history and philosophy and English, and to some extent, foreign languages. The support for the arts was really much less pronounced than for the humanities, generally. I was just appalled, when I became dean, at the difference between the salaries of music people and art people and those in English and history and so forth. It was just disgraceful.

**Charnley:** Do you remember in terms of the specifics and proportion? Was it half?

**Sullivan:** I would say they were a third lower.

**Charnley:** Wow. Thirty-three percent lower than in many—

**Sullivan:** That's just off the top of my head.

**Charnley:** Right.

**Sullivan:** Paul Varg started this before, but we continued to finally convince people that that was as much a part of the university as other things. And Wharton was sympathetic to that. John Cantlon was, too, when he became provost.

**Charnley:** It seemed hard to maintain or attract good people in the arts if they weren't paid anything.

**Sullivan:** It was kind of amazing that we did as well as we did, especially in music, considering the disadvantages they were working against. There were people around here who fully believed that music teachers didn't need as much money because they gave private lessons. These people were consulting on pesticides and so on and so forth, but that was different. [Laughter] So the argument would often be, "Well, they're giving private lessons."

**Charnley:** So they can sing for their supper, right? [Laughter]

**Sullivan:** Yes, they can sing for their supper. That's right, yes.

**Charnley:** As you look back, were there any faculty members that you had or maybe had some that you're proud of, or that actually you felt responsible in bringing them or actively seeking them out, or anything like that?

**Sullivan:** There were a lot of good faculty people who were hired while I was--I think probably the one that I think most about is Ralph Votapek.

**Charnley:** You were dean when he first came?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** When we talk about the arts and humanities within the curriculum of the university, were there any major changes while you were dean, during that time, in terms of undergraduate education, that you recall?

**Sullivan:** No, I don't think that there was anything spectacular. I suspect that we were on the way while I was dean, we began to be on the way while I was dean, to bring together the University College and the core colleges, what eventually came to pass, which was something that had to be faced, because it was getting to the point where it was costing us too much to really run two history departments and two literature departments and two sociology departments, and so on and so forth. So something had to be done about that. I think that that began to be worked out while I was dean. We began to move towards some kind of consolidation of this effort.

**Charnley:** Ultimately that resulted in the end of University College.

**Sullivan:** End of University College, yes, and the merger of its departments into various academic departments.

**Charnley:** I believe ours is one of the few remaining departments, American Thought and Language.

**Sullivan:** Yes, right.

**Charnley:** In dealing with the chairs of the various departments that you had to deal with, talk about the administrative style that you had when you were dean. How did you manage?

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

**Charnley:** We were talking with Dean Sullivan in the interview, and we were talking, when the tape ended, about day-to-day administrative activities in the College of Arts and Letters.

**Sullivan:** The day-to-day activities were pretty much carried out by a relatively small staff, compared to what staffs in dean's offices are nowadays. So we had a lot of hard work, but I don't think there was as much paperwork, if you want to call it that, involved in running a university as there is now.

I tried my best to encourage departments to make decisions, responsible decisions, on their own, to get them involved in the decision-making process. That sometimes didn't work as well as it could, because they made what I thought were impossible decisions, so there were often--or sometimes clashes on that score. Generally speaking, I tried to let the departments have their head as much as possible, and I think they did, in matters such as hiring and promotions and salary distribution and so forth.

**Charnley:** So you preferred to model rather than micro-managing?

**Sullivan:** Yes. The only thing that I suppose I micro-managed a bit was the allocation of resources, because we had so few that we had to be very sure of what we were doing with modest resources. See, when I was dean, the college was really hit hard financially because of the precipitous decline in student enrollment in the seventies,

especially history and English. That was true all over the country, and so that meant resources were increasingly squeezed out of us.

**Charnley:** So there was a retraction of the graduate programs in Arts and Letters during the seventies?

**Sullivan:** There was a retraction primarily in undergraduate enrollment. That's where the big blow came, so to speak. That was, strangely enough, at about the same time when the university began to be enrollment-driven more than it had been in earlier days. I don't know whether you remember or not, but there was a time when people didn't pay much attention to enrollment much. You had to have a history department, and this and that and the other thing. You just had them. Especially in good times, that was no great problem.

But then two things happened. In the seventies, the university began to be squeezed every place for money, not only in the Arts and Letters, but every place. And then, the same time, those who made the major decisions, or many people who made major decisions about the university became quantitatively oriented. They began to think in terms of what's the bottom line in terms of enrollment and tuition income and so forth. So there was heavy pressure from above to match resources with enrollments, primarily. Of course, that had something to do with staffing needs and staffing needs you don't need and that kinds of things.

So, in a way, that was the biggest challenge that I had to face as dean, how to live with the diminished resources and diminishing resources. That often took some heavy maneuvering, and particularly to try to convince people that they had to give up positions and things of that kind. That's never easy.

**Charnley:** Did you see any competition between the departments within the college? How did you deal with some of those problems?

**Sullivan:** Well, that was primarily a problem. There was competition, obviously. I'm sure there still is competition among departments for resources. It was primarily a matter in the final analysis of reaching some

agreement with department chairs. If you get department chairs on your side, or agreeing with you, then very often they were able to join you in persuading faculties that you had to do this or you had to do that, that was kind of painful.

**Charnley:** Did you have a dean's council or anything like that?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** Where you met regularly with the chairs?

**Sullivan:** We met weekly, yes. Some people thought that was too much, but it really worked out best. That was an occasion where you had ten people sitting around and you could talk to them. They begin to have to see that they have to get along some way, or none of us were going to get along if all of us didn't. So that was a fairly effective way. I had some good chairs, too, during those years.

**Charnley:** Who were some of those?

**Sullivan:** Well, Jim [James F.] Niblock, from music, was a remarkable chair. [unclear] Brauner, the chairman of art, that was another person. Alan Hollingsworth was effective in terms of running his own department. He was not always to get along with, but he was very effective in terms of running his own department.

**Charnley:** He was in English?

**Sullivan:** In English, yes.

**Charnley:** Who was in history then? Do you remember?

**Sullivan:** Jim [James H.] Soltow, for a good part of while I was dean.

**Charnley:** I think when I started in '78, Don [Donald] Lammers had taken over.

**Sullivan:** Yes, Don Lammers.

**Charnley:** In looking back at when President Wharton left, do you remember anything about that, or what status the presidency was in when President [Edgar L.] Harden took over? Were you involved in any way in the search for the new president?

**Sullivan:** No, not in the search. Well, we were kept informed about what was going on and so forth, as the result of our meetings in the council of deans. But so much in process, I was not really involved in that. In fact, some people wondered ultimately whether anybody was involved in it or not. That was a kind of a difficult time in the university. Ed Harden, thank the Lord, had a good steady head and kept things going.

**Charnley:** Then his replacement was [M.] Cecil Mackey. How did you work with Cecil Mackey?

**Sullivan:** Well, I wasn't really dean too much longer after that. Let's see. Wharton left in '78, didn't he?

**Charnley:** I think so.

**Sullivan:** I resigned in September of '79. But I did get to know Mackey, and we got along fine.



**Charnley:** What did you do in '79 then, after you resigned as dean?

**Sullivan:** Yes, I resigned as dean. I took a year's leave, which I hadn't had one since 1961. Then I came back in the history department and went about teaching again. I was acting chairman for one year. I can't remember which year it was now. Just before Fred Williams got to be chairperson.

**Charnley:** '83?

**Sullivan:** '82, maybe '82. Then I had two stints in the provost's office, acting associate provost.

**Charnley:** Who was the provost at the time when you were the associate?

**Sullivan:** The provost was Lee [Clarence L.] Winder.

**Charnley:** Lee Winder was first?

**Sullivan:** Yes. Then the second time, David Scott was.

**Charnley:** I wanted to ask your question about your leave that you took. Did you go back to Europe?

**Sullivan:** No, we took a trip to the West Coast. We'd never been to the West Coast, so we took a three-month driving trip. We drove to the West Coast, saw a lot of people we'd known through the years or met through the years. Then I came back and I really had some unfinished publishing business that I had been putting off for years and years, because I was otherwise involved, so I got on to that right away. That's what I've really been busy at that ever since, in a way.

**Charnley:** What did you end up publishing after you got back from your leave?

**Sullivan:** I published a collection of talks I'd given about history to public audiences, not scholarly papers, but about history in terms of what it should mean to an educated, interested public. That's what these are mostly about. I published a book on [unclear] missionary activity. I edited a collection, and contributed to a collection of essays that had to do with the [unclear] world. Let's see, what else? Did several editions of a textbook during those years.

**Charnley:** Revisions?

**Sullivan:** Revisions, yes, which took quite some time.

**Charnley:** Of course. In terms of those revisions, was it formatting, was it text, additional research?

**Sullivan:** Well, it was research and text, yes. There had been a lot of change in what people are interested in in history, in the last--it's been almost four decades since the book was originally published. It has been that long. There have been a lot of changes in what people are interested in in history, so we had to keep incorporating new parts of the new themes into the book, trying to keep it the same length. There's limits on what you can do in terms of a textbook. So there's a lot of work involved in it. I had a long span of time, ancient and medieval history, really, so I kept being busy trying to keep up on those. I knew I was going to have to do revisions. So part of my research, so to speak, was trying to keep up in those various fields.

**Charnley:** How is Professor Harrison in terms of collaboration?

**Sullivan:** Very good. Yes. Eventually, he was not able to continue. We had to bring a third person in.

**Charnley:** Was it a health issue on his part?

**Sullivan:** Yes. He just got to the point where he couldn't do the work anymore.

**Charnley:** Who was that third person?

**Sullivan:** His name is Dennis Sherman. He was a student I had. I taught at Michigan one year on a substitute basis over there, and I met him. He was a graduate student at the University of Michigan, so I got acquainted with him there.

**Charnley:** And how was it you ended up at the University of Michigan for a semester?

**Sullivan:** Well, I was invited there to teach, which is always kind of nice to be a visiting professor. A good friend of mine was there, who was going to be away for the year, so she arranged to have me take her place. I found it kind of a welcoming thing to do.

**Charnley:** That type of exchange doesn't seem to go on very often now.

**Sullivan:** Well, I learned some things. This was before I became an administrator that I did this. I learned some things that I would never be part of. I tell you, they do things in strange ways at the University of Michigan. I don't think we want to put them on record, but they do. [Laughter]

**Charnley:** Let's talk about the provost and your duties that you had to do. What were your main tasks as associate provost, even though it was relatively short?

**Sullivan:** Well, it was primarily a budgetary thing. It was my job to try to keep track of where the money was going in the university as a whole, and trying to be sure that it was going to things that were the best things possible. So it was a kind of a fiscal oversight position. The provost made the decisions, obviously, but it was my job to provide information.

**Charnley:** Those were tough times in the eighties.

**Sullivan:** Early eighties, yes.

**Charnley:** In terms of the Michigan economy, and even the national economy. But the Michigan economy and education, those were pretty rough times.

**Sullivan:** Education was hit pretty hard, yes.

**Charnley:** I know that was a major problem in President Mackey's tenure as president.

**Sullivan:** I believe that was probably the worst time, about its worst time.

**Charnley:** Were there cutbacks of programs that you had to deal with?

**Sullivan:** That was always the problem. It turned out that that was very difficult to do. Probably we should have done that. I believe that the record will show in the long run that Michigan State was badly overcommitted from the Hannah days. It committed itself to programs, to student enrollments, and buildings, all of which have ongoing expenses. You commit the money the first day, that's not the end of it in any sense. So in a sense, this university,

when the hard times came after the really good times, when the hard times came, it was really overcommitted, and we probably had programs that we should not have continued to support. We had graduate programs probably that we should have--but that's very difficult to do.

**Charnley:** When students are involved.

**Sullivan:** Interests are involved. Pressure groups come to the fore. You perhaps remember in Arts and Letters when an effort was made to abolish the religion department. Do you remember what a fuss that was?

**Charnley:** Yes.

**Sullivan:** That was just a very small department and a very small clientele. But it turned out that nothing could really be done about it. And there were a lot of other programs the same way.

**Charnley:** Nursing, I know, [unclear].

**Sullivan:** Yes. Arts and Letters is a relatively cheap place to run compared to some other places, where you have to have tremendous outlays of equipment and building space. About all Arts and Letters needs is a few desks and offices.

**Charnley:** And students.

**Sullivan:** Students.

**Charnley:** As associate in that area, did the provost turn to you, and make you be, let's say, the guy with the black hat?

**Sullivan:** No. The provosts that I worked with were not that kind. They filled their job. It was their responsibility and they lived up to it, but they depended on people to give them information and give them advice that made sense.

**Charnley:** What did you think about that level? Obviously it was later in your career, but in terms of administration, did you find that rewarding, frustrating, or a combination thereof?

**Sullivan:** It was late in my career, so it didn't make that much difference in some ways. I guess the only thing that I really felt good about was that when I saw the university from that level, that I'm glad I didn't take a provost job which I'd been offered two or three times before that in the institution. I'm glad I didn't. I decided I was just not cut out for deanship.

**Charnley:** Were you teaching at this time?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** So you taught for your entire--

**Sullivan:** I never missed a teaching quarter all the while I was an administrator. I taught all the time.

**Charnley:** So you taught at least one course while you were dean, also?

**Sullivan:** Yes. I taught my medieval history survey, and I taught two graduate courses every year while I was chairman and dean, associate provost. That's the one thing that kept me sane. I think if you just had administration, you'd lose total track of what a university's all about. You don't meet students and other faculty people at their jobs. You don't know what's going on, really.

**Charnley:** So what's your position on faculty getting involved in administration?

**Sullivan:** Well, I hope they continue to get involved in administration. I think if we're going to run a university that is deserving to be called a university, it's going to have to have people who know what teaching and research is about. I don't think we can really keep our bearings with professional administrators. We come closer and closer to that, but I worry about that. But I think that if faculty members are going to do this, they've got to make up their minds about a couple of things. The first one is that they're going to have to be careful lest they lose touch with the real university. They've got to keep teaching and doing what little research they can. Administrative jobs have got to be defined in terms that allow that to continue to happen.

**Charnley:** Because they can eat your time up otherwise.

**Sullivan:** Yes, they can. I think faculty members are going to have to learn that to be administrators, they have to take criticism. They have to live with criticism. Faculty members tend to be a bit egotistical. They don't like to be criticized, you know. If you're going to be an administrator, you have to be criticized. Professional administrators, they're trained to do that. Thick hide.

**Charnley:** It goes with the territory.

**Sullivan:** But I do really believe that we have to keep faculty people involved, at least to the provost level. I'm not sure about presidents, although I'd like to think that, but I think that presidents in the university have come to have quite different function than watching over an educational establishment. They've got other things to do. I'm sure that there are financial people in the university and so forth that don't need to be faculty members, but up to the provost level, I think they should be people who have had faculty experience and still are close enough to it that they know what's going on.

**Charnley:** The issue of scholarship, and the role of an intellectual, as either an academic leader, could you talk a little about that?

**Sullivan:** As an administrator, you mean?

**Charnley:** Yes.

**Sullivan:** I think that university administrators should try more than many of them do to fill the role of public intellectual, of speaking out on education issues and other issues that impinge on education, to the best of their abilities. They should make that part of their job, to let people know that they are sensitive to what the world around the university is all about. That's really what I'm talking about here, I guess. What tends to happen in administration--and the higher you get, I think the worse it gets--you get locked more and more into kind of routines and almost trivialities that get to be dictated by custom, almost. You do it because it's been done.

**Charnley:** Hard to think great thoughts.

**Sullivan:** It sure is, when you're going to fourteen committee meetings a day.



**Charnley:** Reminded of the scholastic movement.

**Sullivan:** I think we could simplify university administration a good bit if we could somehow learn how to reach collective decisions without so much wasted time and motion.

**Charnley:** Cooperative aspect.

**Sullivan:** That doesn't mean that I'm against committees and so forth, but they do take up an intolerable amount of time.

**Charnley:** In reflecting on the student body, what changes did you see here at Michigan State over the course of your tenure, from your early years? Did you see differences in students?

**Sullivan:** Yes. I think that I saw increasing numbers of students that did not quite have the basic skills that I once presumed were needed to benefit from the university, reading and writing and that sort of thing. Really, a decline in reading capacities, capabilities, that was alarming in terms of what I once thought a university was about. Now, it could be that I was wrong about that. I learned to consider that possibility, at least.

I've also never been able to quite put my finger on this, what I'm talking about here, but I just know it's true, that somehow students once had a much narrower range of interest when they came to university than they now have, fewer things to do. We hear about this now, about students always being stressed out. I've been reading in the newspapers now that students are stressed out. It's mostly because they're so involved in so many different things that have nothing to do with what they're here for. I don't say it's wrong, but that's what's changed. Students used to come in here with a suitcase, and maybe a typewriter if they were really affluent. Now they come in trucks, you know. You have to close the campus down so that they unload their pressure cookers and their microwaves and their computers and their stereos and their TVs.

**Charnley:** I should tell you my daughter's a freshman here, in Landon Hall. I had to bring my van, had to do two trips. [Laughter] You've mentioned everything that I brought in that car.

**Sullivan:** All of those things do take students' time and interest and so forth. That has made a difference, I think. I think students twenty-five years ago were much more concentrated on going to class and studying.

**Charnley:** And we didn't have cable TV.

**Sullivan:** No cable TV. No.

**Charnley:** You alluded to one thing about the typewriter. Now they're having with computers. What's your position on some of the role in technology or changes that you've encountered? How do you see the technological impact on education?

**Sullivan:** I really hate to admit this, but I'm just so out of touch with the possibilities of technology as an educational tool that I just can't answer that question. I know that it's happening, but I've just never been involved in it. I never did use a computer in any connection with a class. I use a computer to do my own work, but that's such simple computing that it's kind of funny. So I don't know. I know that information is available now in quantities that would have been undreamed of when I was teaching. Even in almost my last years of teaching, I just go to the library now and see nobody touches any books, but plenty of information is flowing around.

**Charnley:** Students can take a tour of [unclear] online, which is amazing.

**Sullivan:** Online. It really is. In fact, I think there's so much information out there that I'm not sure they're getting anything out of it, because it overwhelms them and they have not the powers to discriminate about what's important. I'm sure there are wonderful things to be done with new computer techniques and so forth, by way of teaching, but I just don't know what they are. I must confess that. You're probably much better, at least, than I am. A generation younger.

**Charnley:** It's changed history. It's changed the study of history, that's for sure. Now the biggest thing that we're facing is the difficulty in getting students to, just because it's on the Internet, to get them to realize, to critically use the material, which are the same evidentiary problems that historians have faced for thousands of years. Those issues are still there. How do you sample evidence? How do you evaluate it?

**Sullivan:** Do you send students online for information in your teaching now?

**Charnley:** Do I?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** I do personally, but I insist that they go to the library and use the material. I do find students who are reluctant to go to the library, other than to pass through and get warm in the wintertime. I just last week had a student tell me that she spent an hour and a half in the library on assignment that I gave her. I said, "Good." [Laughter] But I'm one of those relatively old-fashioned who does insist that they learn those library skills at the freshman level. So I do that. And I encourage them to blend their sources, but to try and take advantage of some of those things that are online. So I try to do a little bit of both, in terms of their writing and that sort of thing.

As associate provost, that's what you did with David Scott just before you retired?

**Sullivan:** Yes. In fact, I stayed on. I intended to retire a little earlier. I stayed on for a few months to finish, so that he could get a successor. He was leaving, see, so that was—

**Charnley:** He was leaving the university?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** We talked about some of your colleagues in the history department, but what are some of the memorable colleagues that you had, distinguished MSU history department while you were here, during your tenure?

**Sullivan:** Well, one of my greatest favorites, of course, who was Paul Varg, who I thought was a real asset to the history department.

I always admired Fred Williams, particularly for his ability as an undergraduate teacher. I thought he was really superb in that respect. I also admired Fred for his ability to get people around the campus, from other departments and so forth, to think that historians were something besides filled with bunk, as Henry Ford would have said. Fred was very good at connecting with people in the ag school, the engineering school, and so forth, just because he was a good human being, an interesting human being.

Of course there was Marjorie and Harold. You know Marjorie and Harold. They were always a joy to be around.

**Charnley:** They were retired when I started.

**Sullivan:** Were they? Well, they were going strong when I came here.

**Charnley:** I ran into Marjorie a lot doing family history research down at the library of Michigan.

**Sullivan:** She was one of the genuine characters. There aren't many of them anymore, and she was one of them. To deal with her as chairman was really something.

**Charnley:** What was it that made it interesting in her case?

**Sullivan:** It was almost a daily affair that a student would come in after her class, bringing something that she'd left behind. The fire marshal used to come regularly to get her office cleaned up, because she had books stacked, papers. So it was just one thing after another, I guess. She had a very tart tongue, so she could really put people in their places when she wanted to.

**Charnley:** Let's go back to just before you retired. While you were here, were you involved in local community activities or boards, or anything like that? You lived in East Lansing then?

**Sullivan:** Yes. I've always been in East Lansing. I was really one of the first people who established the Michigan Council for the Humanities. I believe you have a grant from them, don't you?

**Charnley:** Yes.

**Sullivan:** Well, John Cantlon and I, and the provost for the University of Michigan, and a lady from the CIO and AF of L in Detroit were the first ones involved in getting a grant from the government to start the Michigan Council for the Humanities. We together hired Ron Means to be the first director.

**Charnley:** He just retired.

**Sullivan:** He just retired. Everybody I had anything to do with is retiring now. My students are retiring one after another.

**Charnley:** What motivated you to start that? What did you see as the need? Was there a need at that time?

**Sullivan:** Yes. Well, first of all, it was a chance to get some funding to use for humanities projects of various kinds. Ron Means really did a remarkable job getting people to apply for grants and bring history into schools and community centers and so on and so forth, literature. So in that respect, it really helped to provide a means to put the humanities before the public in a way that had some meat to it.

**Charnley:** So you see that as a major outreach success of your experience?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** That continues. It's very strong today.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

**Charnley:** This is tape two. We're talking with Dr. Richard Sullivan.

At the time of the ending of the last tape, we were discussing the beginnings of the Michigan Humanities Council. The Humanities Council was an important outreach effort of you, and you saw that. That continues to today.

**Sullivan:** Yes. See, this was really not a university thing. That's not the way the government looked at it. They wanted to get people other than, although it needed university people to play the role of humanists and really to

organize the thing, but it was really intended to bring the money to people in the public who could come up with projects that might be humanistically oriented in some way or another. So in that sense, it was not a university outreach, but in terms of putting the humanities in a position of some visibility, it was a great thing for us.

**Charnley:** When you mention government, we're talking about state government? Federal?

**Sullivan:** Federal government. The Michigan Council of the Humanities, as were all the state councils, every state eventually had one of them, they were funded by the federal government.

**Charnley:** Was that through the National Endowment for the Humanities? That was all part of that national program?

**Sullivan:** Yes. That was one of the programs of the National Endowment.

**Charnley:** Do you remember what year it was that that started?

**Sullivan:** It was sometime during the seventies.

**Charnley:** We can look up the date.

**Sullivan:** I think it was rather early on, but I just don't remember the exact date.

**Charnley:** So this was a major area of cooperation between you and the University of Michigan, the dean there?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** Was there anyone else that was involved in that?

**Sullivan:** Well, there was a dean from Wayne State. And there was a public representative from the labor unions. I can't remember her name. But it was the three universities. We were the ones who got the first grant.

**Charnley:** AFL-CIO.

**Sullivan:** Yes. The requirement of the grant was, of course, to set up a Michigan Council for the Humanities as an independent entity outside of the sphere of any university. John Cantlon was good enough, and the College of Arts and Letters, to provide, at least in the beginning, a place for the Humanities Council to roost, so to speak. It was on the campus, although it rented space. The council rented space. The university supported it, but it was not a university function.

**Charnley:** You must have chosen well, because—

**Sullivan:** Ron did very well, yes.

**Charnley:** Ron Means was there for most of this.

**Sullivan:** I think got to be recognized in the long run as really one of the outstanding heads of the local councils, state councils. Did you know him as a student?

**Charnley:** Yes, I did. Not as a student. I was involved in the Michigan Oral History Association. We got one grant from them to do an oral history project. And then also Sheldon Hackney, when he was head of National



Endowment for the Humanities, invited us to Wayne State. Through my oral history role, I sat next to him and talked with him about some projects that we were involved in. I knew him only briefly before he retired in that.

**Sullivan:** Was that the time he came to the Ford Museum now?

**Charnley:** In my case, the Detroit Historical Museum had just celebrated an opening. They had a whole moving assembly line from the Cadillac plant. He was there dedicating that, because the National Endowment supported that. Then I was in charge of an oral history project that related to workers. The Michigan Council was involved at that time. So that's how I first met him, right at that time. But he was supportive of oral history and saw that as an important outreach, and getting the general public involved in scholarly study and historical study.

Besides the Michigan Humanities Council, anything in terms of East Lansing that you were involved in? Were you asked to be a speaker or anything like that?

**Sullivan:** Yes. I also became a member of the College of Arts and Letters' dean's Community Council. When John [unclear] became dean, one of the first things he did was to draw together a group of people from the community to work with the college, to promote the college interest in the community and so forth. I was ultimately or eventually appointed a member of that council, and still am on it. So I've been involved in that kind of thing.

I suppose I would have to define myself as not much of an organization person. I have always been involved in national history organizations, too, so that's been part of my—

**Charnley:** Could you talk a little bit about those, your role in some of the national groups? You've obviously presented.

**Sullivan:** Yes. I've been an officer. I was, of course, in the American Historical Association. Although I presented papers there, but I was never really involved in that. But the Medieval Academy, which is the

organization which embraces my discipline, I have been much involved in that for many years. I was on its council, and ultimately got to be elected a fellow of the academy. There are 100 people from, roughly, well, about 90 people from the whole Canada and the United States, medievalist who are chosen somewhere along their careers for this. That involves being a kind of spokesperson for the academy, being involved in its activities.

I suppose the greatest involvement was that I was really the person who took the leadership in founding a regional association of medievalists, called the Midwest Medieval Conference, which meets every year and focuses attention on historians from really kind of the Big Ten territory. It extends a little beyond that, but that's mostly where it comes from. We try to bring in medievalists not only from the big universities in this area, but also the smaller schools where people don't have as much opportunity to participate in learned, scholarly activities and so forth. So that's taken up a lot of my time over the years.

**Charnley:** Where was that centered? Was there any university that that became centered?

**Sullivan:** No. It meets from university to university every year at a different one. It's met here twice over the years.

**Charnley:** So it rotates around the Midwest?

**Sullivan:** Yes. Around the Midwest. We go from one place to another. But to keep that going has been something that's taken up some of my time.

**Charnley:** The whole issue of regionalism seems to be an important one.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** Did you face criticism from people, or were there any issues there?

**Sullivan:** This was a kind of thing that--I don't like to talk too much about it, but really it's true. The Medieval Academy really started out and remained for a long time a kind of East Coast establishment, the fertile crescent from the Widener Library to Princeton, that was it. People from else place, except for the rare occasion of a West Coaster, didn't get much time with the Medieval Academy. So, in a sense, this started out as a kind of "To hell with you" sort of thing. "We'll do our own thing if you won't have anything to do with us." Well, the Medieval Academy has changed since then, partly because of this kind of thing. We were the first of the regional associations to get in motion. Pretty soon, the Medieval Academy was meeting out here in the Midwest, you know, and things of that kind.

**Charnley:** Culture beyond the Hudson. [Laughter]

**Sullivan:** Yes, that's right.

**Charnley:** So you faced that in the academic sense.

You mentioned before about the Wharton Center. How did you get involved in that? That was in the 1980s, or was that earlier?

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** Dr. Wharton had left?

**Sullivan:** No, it started before he left.

**Charnley:** While he was here. Even though it wasn't named the Wharton.

**Sullivan:** That's right.

**Charnley:** But he was the driving force behind some of the initial planning.

**Sullivan:** See, at that time, the Lecture Concert Series, as it was then called, was in the College of Arts and Letters.

It was under the umbrella of the College of Arts and Letters. Since that program was directly interested in having a better facility, to take the place of the auditorium, naturally, as head of that, I was drawn into the planning and the discussion and so forth, for the Wharton Center. So from the very beginning, I was involved in that as part of the planning committee and on and on and on. That was a long drawn-out affair, especially getting the money for it.

**Charnley:** Were you involved in getting the money?

**Sullivan:** Yes, although, primarily, that's not one of my great strengths, raising money. But they hired a professional money-raiser, and I worked very closely with him. He knew how to do this, and I could help him. So that's how I was involved in it, primarily. So I went on and talked to people.

**Charnley:** And you were at the dedication?

**Sullivan:** Oh, yes.

**Charnley:** First time you walked into the Great Hall, what do you remember?

**Sullivan:** Well, I had been walking into it for a couple of years while it was being built. It was a great moment in my life, I will have to admit that, and, I think, a great moment in this university's history. I still think it's a feather in this university's cap that only slowly are people beginning to realize it. We get crowds in here night after night, week after week, to fill that place. It's really something. I'm not sure it can match the basketball team all the time.

**Charnley:** They're playing tonight.

**Sullivan:** That's right.

**Charnley:** But it seems to me to be important in both areas.

**Sullivan:** One of the interesting things about the Wharton Center was that it met a good bit of opposition within the university because lots of people wanted to build something like what the Breslin Center is, an all-purpose facility where you can play basketball and have concerts. It was just ridiculous to think that we--you know, we already had one of those kinds of places in the auditorium. It was just ridiculous to think that we should spend X millions of dollars on just that, only that, because many kinds of artistic performances just don't work in places like Breslin Center. So it was a big battle at the time.

**Charnley:** So there was pressure at the time then to just simply remodel or redo the auditorium, versus a new facility?

**Sullivan:** Well, there was pressure to do nothing. To build a Breslin Center or something like that. That's what the pressure was for. To build another auditorium, all-purpose. Except that this would be athletics as well tractor-pulls and string quartets. All that would go in the same building.

**Charnley:** The circus, too. [Laughter] Interesting, when you think about it.

**Sullivan:** That's where Wharton really stood his ground. And you can imagine that there would be a lot of people in the public domain who would think that would be a good thing, too, used to going to concerts, or interested in going to concerts.

**Charnley:** Would you say that in terms of what the Wharton Center offers today, that it met its potential, or what you as an initial planner or person involved, would you feel--

**Sullivan:** I sometimes get a little impatient that perhaps the Wharton Center is a little too commercialized now, but I know that it has to keep the doors open, the heat bill paid and so forth. So I'm realistic enough to know that you have to have a lot of things to draw a lot of people or you can't keep a place like that open.

**Charnley:** I know that was a controversy when *Les Mis* [*Les Misérables*] first came.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** That [unclear] couldn't play there because *Les Mis* staging was there.

**Sullivan:** Yes. I have concerns about that, but still, I think on the whole that we get a huge variety of programs that are quality programs. Taken together, they do the university's name well. They really do, I think.

**Charnley:** Were you ever involved in international outreach at all? Not counting your international travel or anything like that, or scholarship, were you involved in any international programs that the university had?

**Sullivan:** The truth was that the College of Arts and Letters really had the first overseas programs. Nobody recognized it. Everybody's taking credit now for inventing this now, like Al Gore and the computer. Everybody's taking credit for it, but we had study programs abroad for years before the university took it up as a real mission. I used to visit those places periodically, in Germany and in France and in Spain and Italy.

**Charnley:** So it was primarily language oriented?

**Sullivan:** Culture, too. We began to expand on. It started out as language programs, but they began to tack on culture. Students can go to Freiburg in Germany and really get a year's worth of academic programs besides German.

**Charnley:** Were you involved in setting up any of those exchange programs, either with faculty--

**Sullivan:** Oh, yes.

**Charnley:** So you were, during your tenure.

**Sullivan:** Oh, yes.

**Charnley:** Were there any ones that you remember that you actually did? You mentioned Freiburg.

**Sullivan:** We had a program at Freiburg, yes. We had some people come here as visiting professors that were very interesting. Dennis--I can't remember his name right now, an Englishman who came to the history department. I can't remember his name. Anyway, quite a character. And there were several visiting professors while I was dean, and have been since.

**Charnley:** In looking at your own background, you mentioned how important the study of Latin was obviously in determining your end career. How about the classical languages here at Michigan State during the time you were here?

**Sullivan:** Well, languages had a tough time of it while I was dean, because students were rebelling against all requirements. The language requirement was one they rebelled against most, you know, because to most of them, it didn't seem to have any particular value. So a good part of the university gave up a language requirement while I was dean, which didn't do the language departments any good, because it really took their bread and butter away from them. So that was a major problem for us. But survived. In fact, the study of languages has come back very nicely now, and on a much more realistic basis, I think, in requirements and all that stuff.

Language instruction offered a very difficult problem from an administrator's point of view. Almost no one in French or German or Spanish wanted to teach the beginning languages; they wanted to teach literature.

**Charnley:** Of the language?

**Sullivan:** Yes. So it ended up that language was being taught by graduate assistants who were learning the language. It was not a very happy arrangement.

**Charnley:** One chapter ahead.

**Sullivan:** Yes. One chapter ahead, if that. Even the graduate students were thinking about becoming literature professors, so they weren't even interested in teaching these languages. So there was always that terrible problem of what students thought was bad instruction, and I must admit it was bad instruction sometimes. Not that graduate



students are no good, but they just did not yet have the skills to do what--that's a tough job to teach a foreign language. It's not easy.

**Charnley:** The new push of the university toward international study abroad, what do you think about that?

**Sullivan:** I'm all in favor of it, yes. I hope it doesn't become kind of routinized, and thus not very valuable. If you get too many native Americans in one place abroad, they're going to end up not learning anything about being abroad. They're going to live with themselves.

**Charnley:** Not part of the culture.

**Sullivan:** Not part of the culture. So I'm fearful that the programs will get out of hand in that respect. There will be too many American students, MSU students, concentrated in one place for their own good. Students almost ought to go alone abroad, I think.

**Charnley:** So you see it as large numbers are not necessarily better.

**Sullivan:** Not necessarily better. Students can't go without getting something out of it, but not as much as--if they start hanging around only with each other, then it's not going to work very well, I don't think.

**Charnley:** It seems to me, too, the key is the involvement of faculty in that overseas study, and encouragement.

**Sullivan:** Yes. Is that occurring much now?

**Charnley:** Well, I think it's more or less a faculty member can develop a program, and so that's encouraged, but we're not giving them development money to do that.

**Sullivan:** So it's not really yet a priority in financial terms.

**Charnley:** Not quite. It is from the student side. It's more or less an interdisciplinary and outside of College of Arts and Letters perhaps. Perhaps our new dean, that will be different perhaps, I think.

If we talk about some staff members, lots of times in the part of the university we talk about faculty, we talk about students, presidents, provosts. Some of the everyday staff members in terms of actually running, who were some staff members that you worked with that you recall that maybe were important in your work?

**Sullivan:** Well, I had a remarkable series of secretaries over the years. Sandy Cuthbertson in the history department.

**Charnley:** When you were chair?

**Sullivan:** Chair. Ethel McWhinney as the dean's secretary. Joyce Hardy in the provost's office. Barb--what was her name? I think Michigan State's been very lucky in its secretarial staff. I think they're really dedicated people who do their job very well, and sometimes have more commitment than some of the people they're working for.

**Charnley:** Interesting approach.

**Sullivan:** I've always admired the staff of the library for doing great things with the least amount of resources that I think any library in the Big Ten has. I've always been amazed at the ability of people like Dick [Richard] Chapin,

those who manage the hordes of students who work in the library and somehow get the work done. I've always thought that's the best-run place in the whole university.

**Charnley:** You mentioned, going back to the library, the tremendous change in your field. Were there any librarians or bibliographies that expanded the collections in the medieval area?

**Sullivan:** Yes. I suppose Henry Cole [phonetic]. I don't know if you knew him or not, but he was a kind of acquisitions librarian with interest in history, old-time history, even. So he was always very open to suggestions for purchasing books and so forth.

The central administration finally came around to seeing the importance of a library. For example, I was head of a university committee that really planned the addition to the library. We had to go to the state legislature to get money for it. John Hannah got into that in a big way. Of course, it wouldn't have happened had he not.

**Charnley:** It's part of the transition from college to major university.

**Sullivan:** Yes. As I said, when I first came here, the library was where the museum is now.

**Charnley:** Within the same building.

**Sullivan:** Same building, yes. You can imagine how many books you could get in there.

**Charnley:** Are there any specific resources, either while you were in the history department or as dean, in your specific area, medieval history, that we acquired?

**Sullivan:** Oh, yes.

**Charnley:** Not to give a card catalog, but are there any successes? Are students studying medieval history at Michigan State now has got those resources because of your work?

**Sullivan:** Well, it was the work of several of us, in fact. We bought, at rather considerable expense, collections of printed medieval documents. They were mostly compiled in the 19th century, the great age of editing and publishing source material of all kinds. We bought one after another of those kinds of collections. The library is full of them. Our remote storage is full of them more often than not.

**Charnley:** So you have to wait a little.

**Sullivan:** I suppose the most difficult thing, and the thing that has not been kept up as well as I like, but I understand why, we convinced the library to begin to invest in scholarly productions, many of them in foreign languages that had to do with ancient and medieval European history in general, and ultimately in Asian and African history. A lot of periodicals, which is a very expensive item. It's gotten more expensive through the years. We haven't kept up as well on that as we should. A lot of them have been canceled in the last few years, for financial reasons, partly, I think, to pay for new kinds of technology. I don't have any doubts about the fact that they don't give computers away.

But the library was really--you know, I'm not the only one. You could ask twenty people in the English department as well as twenty people in the history department who were old-timers, if you could get them together, they would all agree that that was kind of a miracle, what happened in the library during those years.

**Charnley:** So you credit Dick Chapin with a lot of that.

**Sullivan:** Yes. Not only did he run a good library, but he was able to persuade people who made critical decisions about what the money went for that it was important to have a library.

**Charnley:** As you look back on your entire career here and how the university has changed, what are your thoughts on Michigan State University now in the 21st century?

**Sullivan:** Well, as I said before, I think it has some very serious decisions ahead of it about what it's going to do with itself. I have a feeling that it's been drifting the last few years, in terms of any kind of focus. I don't think that it's going to be able to continue that. I think it's going to have to decide on doing certain things.

I hope it doesn't decide to just become a service institution, that is, totally oriented toward doing whatever society wants it to do. I understand that's important, and I wouldn't for a moment knock that, but I do think a university has to be independent in one sense of the word. It has to insist that there must be new knowledge. That new knowledge must be sought out, even if it doesn't pay off. That's the responsibility of the university, if it's going to call itself that. You can be something else and call yourself a university. That's what I think the decision has to be. What is it that we are going to put our resources into?

I don't think we have any business having three medical schools here. I really don't think that's going to make this a university. Something has to be decided about that. I'm not sure that we can support all kinds of programs that are geared entirely to doing things for people outside that ask us to do specific things about travel programs.

**Charnley:** A vocational school?

**Sullivan:** Yes, vocational. I don't like to use that word, because I know people have to have a vocation. But a university has to transcend that level of operation, and it has to persuade the public to support it to do that. That's a political problem as much as it is an intellectual problem, I think. I would hate to see the day come when only a few

private institutions have this responsibility, because I don't think they do as good a job in many ways as public universities do. I celebrate the fact that I've been here while Michigan State became what it is now, and I think my career kind of spanned the crucial period in its growth, not to take anything away from the first 100 years. But the last 50 years have been something really special in many ways, the first 25 years and the last 50 years.

Once that was over, we could remain to be, how are we going to continue now? You can't keep inventing yourself every year. You've got to somehow live with what you are. I think that's where we are at this moment. I don't see much discourse on that subject these days. Now, maybe I'm wrong. I'm retired and I know that, and so forth. Maybe there is discourse on it, but I don't think so. I think that whatever discourse there is about the future of this place is focused on who can we please next.

**Charnley:** I want to thank you for the time that you've spent and sharing your ideas with us and contributing to the oral history project.

**Sullivan:** I hope it amounts to something. I never know how interviews come out. They sound good when you're talking sometimes, but you never know how it all goes together.

**Charnley:** I want to thank you, and I appreciate your time.

**Sullivan:** Well, I'm glad to help out in any way. I take it we can someday see all these in the archives.

**Charnley:** Absolutely.

**Sullivan:** Are you going to interview Milt Milder [phonetic]? You should do that. Maybe somebody already has.

**Charnley:** I think so. Is there anybody else that you can think of that maybe should be, either a former student--

**Sullivan:** Fred Williams.

**Charnley:** Fred Williams. Obviously we'd want to try to do that. We obviously missed Paul Varg.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** I was his last graduate student. [Laughter] On my committee. My degree is here. Paul Varg was on my committee, too. He always asked the question I couldn't answer. [Laughter]

**Sullivan:** You know, if it were ever possible, it might be worth your time, or somebody's time, to talk to Jim Niblock, who for many years was chairperson of the music department.

**Charnley:** Is he still in the area?

**Sullivan:** Yes, he still lives in the area. He can tell you a great deal about that side of the university, which really has its own story.

**Charnley:** The performing arts.

**Sullivan:** Yes.

**Charnley:** Anyone in art that you can think of?

**Sullivan:** Now, let see. My old friends in art are somehow out of the picture.

**Charnley:** You can let me know if you can think of anyone.

**Sullivan:** Okay. Let me think about that a little bit. In English, let's see. Most of the old-timers there are retired too. Dave Mead would be a good one. M-E-A-D. I hope somebody got Russ Nye's record down, but I doubt it.

**Charnley:** Probably not.

**Sullivan:** I'm kind of surprised that somebody hasn't been doing this for a long time.

**Charnley:** Well, it's the type of thing that people talk about, think it's a good thing, but never actually do it. So I was pleased that, finally, they said, at least we'll get started. And then this will be an archive that will be available.

**Sullivan:** I'm sure that Fred would be open to this kind of thing.

**Charnley:** When I call him up, I don't think it will be a tough sell.

Again, thank you very much.

**Sullivan:** You bet.

[End of interview]



## Index

- \_\_\_\_\_, Harold 38  
 \_\_\_\_\_, John 43  
 \_\_\_\_\_, Marjorie 38
- Adams, Arthur 6  
 Adams, Pauline 17  
 Adams, Walter 15, 17  
 American Historical Association 43
- Boger, Lawrence L. 17  
 Brauner, \_\_\_\_\_ 24  
 Breslin Student Events Center 19, 47
- Cantlon, John 20, 39, 42  
 Chapin, Richard 53, 55  
 Cole, Henry 53  
 Cuthbertson, Sandy 52
- Fee, Walter 5, 14
- Garrity, Jack 6  
 Glick, Al 6
- Hannah, John A. 14, 18, 30, 53  
 Harden, Edgar L. 25  
 Hardy, Joyce 52  
 Harrison, \_\_\_\_\_ 12, 28  
 Hart, Paul 7  
 Hollingsworth, Alan 24
- M. Cecil Mackey 29  
 Mackey, M. Cecil 25  
 Madison, \_\_\_\_\_ 8  
 McWhinney, Ethel 52  
 Mead, Dave 58  
 Means, Ron 39, 40, 42  
 Medieval Academy 43, 45  
 Michigan Council for the Humanities 39, 41, 42  
 Michigan State University  
     Big Ten 7, 8  
     Centennial 7  
 Midwest Medieval Conference 44  
 Morgan, William 8
- National Endowment for the Humanities 41  
 Niblock, James F. 24, 58  
 Northeast Missouri State College 1, 4

Nye, Russ 58

Scott, David 26, 37

Sherman, Dennis 28

Soltow, James H. 25

University College 21

University of Illinois 2, 3

University of Michigan 28, 29, 41

University of Nebraska 2

Varg, Paul 15, 20, 38, 57

Votapek, Ralph 20

Walsh, Jim 8

Wayne State University 42

Wharton Center for Performing Arts 18, 19, 45, 47, 48

Wharton, Clifford R., Jr. 15, 18, 20, 25, 45, 48

Williams, Fred 6, 26, 38

Winder, Clarence L. 26

Yorson, Dick 6