This interview was conducted with Rick Osen, alumni of Western Washington University (Huxley College, BS 1979), and Western Libraries staff member, 1977-2014. Rick's library career began as a library student assistant (1977) and took him through almost all areas of the Libraries including serving as Acting Dean of Libraries during the 2012/13 academic year; he retired in 2014.

TB: Today is Monday, April 8, [2019]. My name is Tamara Belts. I'm here with Rick Osen. And we're going to do an oral history with Rick, as a long-term library employee. He is also an alumni of Western, so we're going to first start with a few questions that we always ask our alumni.

So, why did you choose to attend Western?

RO: I already had a degree from Simpson College in Iowa, and then I had spent four years in the Air Force.   The year after I got out of the Air Force, a friend and I both got interested in environmental issues. We were living in Spokane. At that time Huxley was one of the original environmental study schools in the nation. We came over and visited, and we decided that we'd apply for enrollment the next year. We moved to Bellingham and started at the beginning of fall quarter, 1976.

TB: Okay. And so what were your dates of attendance at Western?

RO: I attended the school year 1976-1977, though I really only did two quarters that year, fall and winter. I took spring off, except for doing an independent study. Then I went to summer school that summer. Then I took a year off before attending the entire 1978-1979 academic year.

TB: Okay. And then what degrees or certificates did you receive from Western?

RO: Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies.

TB: Okay. And then you already mentioned it, but what degree did you earn then from Simpson College in Iowa?

RO: It was a Bachelor of Arts in Education with a concentration in Physical Education and a teaching certificate.

TB: So you were, when you came to Western, living with your buddy. Any other favorite times? Memories from your off-campus hours, I guess, in terms of some people etc.?

RO: Well, not too much. I was coming as an older student; I would have been almost 28 when I enrolled at Western. And truthfully—my friend was also the same approximate age—we didn't spend a whole lot of time on campus other than coming to classes. Though we used to come to some ballgames. I remember going to basketball games and stuff like that. But typically we weren't very involved in student life at Western because we were older students, pursuing second degrees, at the time.

TB: So who were your favorite or most influential teachers?

RO: Well, Lynn Robbins was my advisor at Huxley, and I took more classes from him than anyone else. And John Miles I also remember very fondly from Huxley. This was before he became Dean. So those two I think were the most influential. And I'm still good friends with Lynn to this day.

TB: So when did you start working in the library as a student employee?

RO: In the summer session, 1977.

TB: Okay. So what was the library like when you came as a student, or how much awareness do you have of being able to remember it?

RO: I didn't intentionally seek employment at the library. I just saw they were advertising for help in the summer, and I didn't have any big expectations about that. I was on the GI Bill and thought a little extra spending money would be nice, so I applied. And I found out that I liked library work. I was at the Circulation Desk, what was called the Loan Desk back in those days, which involved shift work—evenings, weekends, and that was fine. I was used to that kind of schedule in the Air Force, always working shift work. So it wasn't that big of a deal for me. And I liked the work.

But then at the end of that summer I left Bellingham. I had met Barbara earlier that year when she was in the United States working temporarily at Eastern Washington University. She had to go back home to Poland at the end of the summer, so I followed her there and we got married in Poland. We were returning to Bellingham at the end of the summer of 1978 from Poland and I was re-enrolled in school. I had contacted Christine Kendall, for whom I had worked in the summer of 1977, at the Loan Desk to see if she might need student help for the fall of 1978. So she said, sure, come on back. And so then I worked at the Loan Desk for the entire school year of 1978-1979, including intersessions and pretty much any other hours I could pick up.

Then that summer, after I had earned my Huxley degree, I was hired into a temporary staff position. By the end of that summer, the evening staff person, Connie Horstmann, left her position and moved away. I got hired into the night position beginning in the fall of 1979. At that time, the library was changing its closing hour from 11 p.m. to midnight, so I was hired to work 3 p.m. to midnight, Sunday through Thursday. I did that for the first two full years that I worked in a staff position at the library.

TB: Okay, so that means 1979 to 1981. What happened then?

RO: I believe it was spring of 1981 that the person then in charge of the Loan Desk, Ginny Roecker, resigned and left town. I got hired into the position of Loan Desk supervisor.

TB: So then you were there until you went to the Music Library?

RO: Yes. I had that job for about four years. And then in 1985, some administrative rearrangements were made in the library, including the elimination of the Loan Desk supervisor job. The Music Library supervisor position was vacant, and a new supervisor position in Science Reference was being established. It was understood that Christine Kendall and I were going to fill those two positions. Each of us interviewed for both jobs with the librarians in charge of them, Marian Ritter and Kathy Haselbauer. It worked out amicably as I opted for the Music Library position, and Christine took the job in Science Reference.

TB: Okay, excellent. And so you were there for just a year?

RO: I went there in the summer of 1985. One of the issues coming up was that Marian was going to be gone on leave that upcoming winter. Harry Ritter, her husband, was going on sabbatical to Vienna for research, and Marian wanted to go with him. So as soon as fall quarter was over in mid-December 1985, she left and didn't return to work until the start of spring quarter at the end of March. I managed the Music Library along with student assistants, which worked out fine. I knew some music since I had played trombone from sixth grade through high school in both bands and ensembles and other things, and so I could read music and knew works from some composers, and that helped a lot stepping into the job there because it was obviously heavily based on music. (Laughing) There were some really good student assistants, and it was a very busy job. It wasn't too long after I left that position that it was determined to have a second staff person there besides the supervisor, but I don't remember exactly when that happened.

Then in late spring of 1986, or thereabouts, Ruby Gunderson, the Circulation manager retired, and there was a recruitment for a Circulation Department supervisor. It was the next category up. I was a Supervisor A, and this was going to be a Supervisor B job, which was to oversee both the Stacks Maintenance (Return Room) supervisor (Carolyn Mendenhall) plus the Loan Desk. Marie Vosti was still supervising the Reserve Room at that time, and she was going to be separate.

TB: Okay. So then you came to Circulation. Is that when Frank Haulgren went to the Music Library?

RO: No. Marian had a summer research grant in 1986, and so the deal was I got hired as the Circulation supervisor, but I also supervised the Music Library that summer until she came back to work full-time. They didn't necessarily want a new person there when Marian wasn't around. I think that that's when Virginia Beck was hired. I think she replaced me at the Music Library, but I'm not sure about that.

TB: That would make sense and that Frank was later.

RO: No, Frank never worked over there.

TB: Okay. I remember talking to him about it. Oh that's when June McKenzie got the job.

RO: Yes. So Virginia for sure replaced me over there.

TB: Then she came to the library in [1989] to Special Collections, I know that she was over there awhile.

RO: Yes.

TB: Okay, so then let's talk about you back in Circulation. There were so many things that happened in that time.

RO: Yes.

About a year later Marie Vosti retired. When Marie retired it was decided that the Reserve Room would report to me, as well. I had hired Frank Haulgren in 1984 to work the evening shift at the Loan Desk. The first hire I ever made when I became the Loan Desk supervisor was Lanny Birdsell to replace me on the evening shift. About three years later Lanny left to go to grad school in Detroit, I think. Anyway, when he left I hired Frank. Then when the Reserve Room position opened up, I hired Frank to be the Reserve Room supervisor. So, the Circulation Department then consisted of the Reserve Room with a supervisor, the Stacks Maintenance (Return Room) with a supervisor, and the Loan Desk with a lead technician, which I believe was Kim Marsicek by then. That was about 1987, I think. Anyway, since I had taken over as Circulation supervisor I had reported to Dan Mather, who was the lone Associate Director at that time, the library having downsized from two Associate Directors to one.

TB: Oh, because Bob Cross retired in 1987?

RO: This was a little before he retired. There were some budget issues and some criticism was raised that the library was too top heavy administratively. So Bob Cross moved into the Reference Department for the last year or so before he retired. And Dan was then the only Associate Director, and I reported to him. But somewhere right around the end of 1987 or the beginning of 1988, Dan retired. And then Diane Parker made the decision to use that position to hire a professional, Tom DeRose, to run Media Services. I don't remember what his title was (Director), but before that there was a higher-level staff person in charge of the Media Services in Miller Hall, which reported to the library at that time. Diane decided she wanted a professional person there, so she used the vacated Associate Director position to make that hire.

TB: And Dan had been over in Media Services for a while.

RO: I think he'd been keeping an eye on it, yes. Anyway, when he retired, then Diane asked me to take over the Facilities management and planning work that had been part of Dan's oversight.

TB: That's what I was wondering, okay. So that's about 1988?

RO: Yes, I think it was 1988 and the first facilities project I oversaw was the installation of the compact shelving in Wilson Library's basement. We were starting to plan that when Dan retired. Also, sometime not very much later than that, maybe a year or so, there was another administrative reorganization, and Interlibrary Loan got moved from Reference over to –

TB: Resource Services, I bet.

RO: Yes, to report up through me, too. We didn't really combine the operations but we combined the space for Interlibrary Loan with Reserves in the old Reserve Room, which is now Zoe's Bookside Bagels. So Frank took over the supervision of that, as well.

TB: And you were reporting to Donna Packer though then, right?

RO: Well, I'm not quite sure of the timeline on that. When Dan first retired, I reported directly to Diane for a period of time. I think it was at that time that my position was reallocated to Program Manager A because of all the various areas that I was in charge of—Interlibrary Loan, Reserves, Loan Desk, Stacks Maintenance, and Facilities management. At some point the library organized around three operational areas—Public Services, Technical Services, Access Services. The Access Services units reported to me and Donna Packer became the Head of Access Services, so I started reporting to her. I'm guessing this might have been around 1989 or 1990.

TB: Right. So was your first big project in Facilities beyond the compact shelving the asbestos abatement project?

RO: Yes, I think we did a couple other minor things, but in 1992 a study of facilities about the presence of asbestos was undertaken, and concern was expressed about the library's low ceilings and the asbestos coating that was easy to knock free. It was about that time where the whole nation was getting concerned about all the asbestos in buildings. For years it had been a fire retardant, and nobody thought anything about it, and then they started discovering people that had worked around asbestos for a number of years developed these lung diseases and the like. So it became a major concern right around that time. There was also money then to deal with it, so the state put forward a significant amount of money to take care of the library because it was such a high traffic area. I mean, this stuff was just falling off the ceilings if somebody scraped a book against it or sometimes just on its own. So, I remember attending meetings where the university treated it very seriously, and the legislature promptly provided money for abatement.

As you might remember, it was an extremely significant project in the fact that the affected areas had to have basically everything cleaned up. So we took advantage of that to do a lot of other things that the library needed, which was new lighting, carpet, painting. We repositioned all of the stacks to make them mostly ADA accessible, which also was a fairly new law at that time, and installed them to meet new seismic codes. The project lasted two full years. We did one phase about every quarter. There were eight phases in all. Everybody in the library moved at least twice, and all the collections moved at least twice. I think Carolyn and I figured out that if we had lined up all the print materials moved, it would have stretched from Bellingham up to Blaine, on one shelf. (Laughing) Twenty-some miles of stuff we moved over the two years. And like I said, most of that moved twice, and some got moved more than twice. That is when we started using the Commissary building to store some materials. The Archives Building had just been built when this project got started, making space available.

TB: The University Archives had been in the Commissary, and so had the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies?

RO: Yes. I'm pretty sure it was the University Archives that had been in the space that we occupied in the Commissary building, not the State Archives. We just occupied that one big room, but not the rest of the building.

So, the plan was to move some materials, those considered low use items, out of compact shelving to the Commissary. Then we moved the equivalent of one floor wing of materials in the main library down to compact shelving to keep them in the library. And then we used that emptied floor wing for the staging area for all the other phases. Everybody and everything moved into there, and then back from there when their area got renovated. So, yes, it was a very complicated project.

TB: Is that when you moved to being pro exempt or administrative exempt, whatever your title was?

RO: Well, simultaneously or actually right before that there were two things going on. In about 1990-91 I got involved in two state committees that were both related to the ICCL group, the Inter-Institutional Committee of Chief Librarians. One issue was that the state was looking into doing an upgrade of their *Facilities Evaluation Planning Guide*, a state document with different chapters for different kinds of spaces within higher education institutions. Sifting down from the state's university provosts' group, the ICCL group had been invited to draft an update to the library facilities chapter of the *Facilities Evaluation Planning Guide.* Diane Parker, who I believe was serving that year as chair of ICCL, asked me if I would be interested in working on this, and I said sure. ICCL set up a committee of three people: Sarah Michalak, an assistant director at UW Libraries to serve as chair; Randy Stilson, an archivist and librarian at Evergreen; and, myself. We spent the better part of a year or more revising that chapter. We typically would get together at least once a month at Sarah's office at UW, because it was halfway in between for the other two of us.

Then almost at the same time, there was also another state-wide ICCL concern. At the time there were two personnel boards for state employees, the Higher Education Personnel Board (HEP Board) and the state personnel board for all other state employees. [These were since merged into one personnel board.]. Within the HEP Board, the class specifications for the library series had last been revised in the early 1970s. There was no mention of computers or other current tasks in the job specifications. The HEP Board asked ICCL to propose changes. We had an internal group in our library, as did each of the other libraries, which worked on this. Then there was a coordinating group at the state level, which was primarily representatives from each of the six baccalaureate institutions. We met fairly regularly at UW about that as well. Diane was either the chair or the co-chair of that effort, and I was the other library representative from Western. She and I would travel to these meetings together quite often. Again, this lasted several months.

Both of those efforts were going on simultaneously. And, both of those happened before the asbestos project. Part of the new class specifications that were developed included a new class called Library Unit Manager, which was meant to bring people like me back into the library class series rather than being program managers. [I was a Program Manager B by that time.] I believe I became one of only three people in the state that was assigned to the new classification. There was Gary Jeffries at Eastern and a woman, I can't remember her name, who was involved in running the new branch library for WSU at Vancouver. No sooner than that had been done, the state, because of another change in laws, was looking at what positions in the state shouldn't be identified as classified staff but should instead be exempt staff, or whatever they called it at that time. Later, at Western, it became professional staff. Exempt staff meant being exempt from fair labor standards. In other words, these positions meant being expected to work as much time as it took to get the job done, and there was no 40-hour week, no overtime, no comp time. Each of the universities were charged with examining any jobs on campus that might fit the criteria. And so my position got reviewed by HR here at Western. I think the only other position in the library they reviewed was that of Walton Anderson. They determined Walton was properly classified within the

library series, but they determined that my position should be exempt. Interestingly, I was made exempt for what I was doing at the time, but shortly after I became exempt, Diane moved me into the administration office where parts of my job changed focus. (Laughing)

TB: So was that about 1993 or a little bit earlier?

RO: It was either at the end of 1992 or the beginning of 1993. At the time, we were already planning the asbestos project, plus we'd also already done the first pre-design for the Haggard remodel, which was in 1991 and 1992. I served with Diane on the university committee for that. I had this history of working with Diane on all these different committees, and I think that was one of the reasons she felt comfortable moving me into the administration office. She needed some help, and I think she noticed that ever since Mather retired.

Then about the same time that we were starting the asbestos project, state officials approved the updated version of the *Facilities Evaluation Planning Guide*, on which I'd worked. The library chapter had a lot of formulas that showed how much space you should have to meet both your current needs and for future growth. I immediately applied those formulas to our situation at Western, and through that I showed that the space that was being planned for the library in the first pre-design of Haggard wasn't going to be enough to give us any growth room at all. We were going to fill it up the day we moved in, and everything would be full. I believe Marian Alexander refers to this in her history of the library.

I'm not sure who made the decision, though it was timed when Karen Morse came in as the president, to reevaluate the project and do another pre-design in the next biennium. When funded, major capital projects typically take three biennium. The first two years are for pre-design, the middle two years are the design phase, and the last two years they do the construction, which sometimes, like in the case of Carver, stretches out even further than that. So, Haggard then ended up being an 8-year project because we did two pre-designs.

For the second pre-design we hired Phil Leighton to come in as our library consultant. Diane had set up a committee to select the consultant, and I served on that. We all know sometimes you can tell the powers that be what's really needed but they don't really believe it until they pay somebody else to come in and tell them. (Laughter) Phil was very helpful in demonstrating our needs, and he became a good friend of mine. We stayed in touch for years after that. I worked very close with him for the next couple of years or so. He spent quite a bit of time up here. You probably sat in on some meetings when we were in the planning stages.

TB: It was inclusive, yes. I mean, he met with all the different units and they talked about what they did and what they needed.

RO: Right. Because part of what he was doing was not only helping us out with the Haggard project, but then doing programming for a pre-design for Wilson renovation, which was being planned to follow the completion of the Haggard renovation. Of course the Wilson renovation never happened. But we had the pre-design document ready. Phil met with the staff again and drew out work areas and floor plans. I'm sure you have copies of those documents here in Special Collections.

TB: Even though we never got the money to totally renovate Wilson, we've done bits and pieces at different times. Did this pre-design work become a kind of model that you followed even though you couldn't do the whole building?

RO: We did, we did. We were supposed to get the Wilson renovation done immediately after Haggard was completed and occupied because that was the time when we were going to have the most space before collection growth would start filling it up. Well, that didn't happen. And then the first time we tried to request funds for a smaller project in Wilson, we were told no, this will just be taken care of when the renovation happens. Well, the renovation hasn't happened yet. (Laughing)

So what we did was that we started submitting smaller projects that were based on our Wilson pre-design plans saying that this work will not be wasted even if the renovation goes forward later. And over the next years we addressed a lot of programmatic issues. But we didn't address the infrastructure issues, which are the real pricey parts of renovating an older building. Also, there were space needs associated with how our services were changing and the effects of automation. So, we got pretty successful in getting funding for at least some kind of project or projects every two years to help address programming needs, kind of doing it in stages rather than all at once. But still the main infrastructure things have never been addressed.

TB: Let's go back quickly because I think we got a little bit past the Haggard project. Okay, so who really had the idea of the sky bridge? Was that yours, or was that somebody else's?

RO: No, I can't claim that.

TB: Because we talked about an underground connection, too –

RO: Yes, the underground connection was an idea of the first pre-design study, because we were only going to get the bottom floor in Haggard, just one floor instead of the two floors we ended up with in the second pre-design. So, the idea was to tunnel under the stairwell to connect the bottom floor of Haggard with the Wilson basement. At first we were questioned why we needed to connect the spaces at all. And our argument was that if they weren't connected it would be like a branch library, which are expensive to run.

So I don't remember when the idea of a sky bridge surfaced, but it might have come from the architects, or it might have just been a group effort. I served on the architect selection committee when we chose ZGF to do the design work. [A different firm had done the pre-design.] The library was getting two of Haggard's three floors, and a connection to Wilson was needed. The idea of a sky bridge meant that the library could take the upper two floors rather than the lower two floors. The issue of the sky bridge, though, generated a lot of concern. People were so used to those stairs coming up from High Street going down into Red Square. And there was some concern expressed about a sky bridge destroying the view from the PAC plaza over to Red Square. So, ZGF produced a model of what became the sky bridge, and how it would affect the surroundings. You still have it in Special Collections, right?

TB: Yes, yes we do.

RO: And then ZGF did a computer mock-up that showed how the view would be so much better with the sky bridge than it was with the stairs, because the stairs actually blocked your view of Red Square from

across the street here. The sky bridge model showed that you could view all the way through. We made a presentation to the Board of Trustees about it because it was that big of a deal, a real big deal. And they were convinced that, yes, the view would actually be better. And so the sky bridge turned out to be, I think, the signature part of the project (laughing), the way it's turned out.

TB: Right. It's been a popular place, that's for sure.

RO: Yes. A lot of times those ideas come from people sitting around and just, you know, throwing out possibilities, and then everybody at some point kind of says, yes.

TB: And there already was a sky bridge, wasn't there, between the science buildings? Or was that after?

RO: No, that was done after.

TB: So they modeled it after ours.

RO: Yes. The Chemistry building was built first, I think.

TB: 1993, yes.

RO: And then once we did our sky bridge, when they were building Biology that's when they decided to join it to Chemistry via a sky bridge.

TB: That's when they did it, okay. And Biology was last because SMATE was right after Chemistry. So can you talk a little bit more about -- well, I guess, did you have anything to do with the LIS?

RO: Well, yes, as a matter of fact. The LIS was obviously a major change. Jerry Boles was fairly new to Western when the university funded and started planning the LIS. Also, after Jerry's arrival he reorganized what had been one Computer Center on campus into two distinct groupings, an Administrative Computing group and an Academic Computing/Technology group. And as part of that technology group, that's when Media Services left –

TB: Oh, the library?

RO: Yes. Media Services had been administratively reporting to the library, but were transferred to the new Academic Technology group. Their work was getting more and more technical and computer-oriented. Anyway, a steering committee was set up to oversee the LIS project. The committee was a joint effort between the Provost's Office and the library, and included Jerry Boles, Diane Parker, Marian Alexander and John Havland. However, in 1994 while this planning was well underway, the directorship of the library changed with Marian taking over as the interim or acting director. She appointed Karen Rice to take over the LIS coordinator for the library, thus Karen took Diane's place on the steering committee. Then as planning proceeded, Marian formed two different committees. One was the LIS Implementation Committee, which was the main library thrust of planning all the modules and how it would work and all that, which was chaired by Karen, and the other was the Technical Committee that was going to plan the technical infrastructure and implementation of that. Peter Smith originally was going to chair that committee, but he asked Marian to be removed from it. So she said, Rick… (Laughing)

And I said, really? I don't know technology. And she went, it doesn't matter. Just coordinate the work. And so that was the first time I started working with Jerry Boles regularly, and that working relationship continued for many years up until the time he retired. We had no technical people in the library at the time except for Tom McNeely, who was a student employee. Tom reported to me then. So it was Tom and I and Jerry and two or three people from his new organization, including Don Hicks, who was a programmer, and George Liu, who now I think is the supervisor of the computer maintenance/support, but at that time was brand new at Western. George was going to be involved in equipment installation for the project. There was a couple other people involved off and on, too.

At the time of our planning, it was still pretty common for libraries to use dumb terminals to access their library systems. But Innovative Interfaces, the system we were purchasing, had just come out with their graphical user interface. So, after mulling this over for some time, the decision was made, and I think Jerry was the key in making this decision, that it would be better to go with PCs rather than dumb terminals in order to be prepared for the new interface. PCs would be the future. That was a huge decision at the time, because otherwise if we had purchased dumb terminals, about two years later we would have had to be redoing everything again.

TB: Where was circulation at right then—what had happened in that period between the punch cards and the LIS? Had there been an intermediate step, or were they able to make the transition – We barcoded everything in like 1995.

RO: Yes. Prior to the LIS the administrative computing folks wanted to get rid of the old IBM computer in Bond Hall, which dated back to the 1960s. It was, like, humongous. That was the reason they built Bond Hall the way they did with the large atrium in the middle – so they could get that huge computer up to the floor they wanted it on.

We were the last department still using the IBM on campus, and they wanted to get rid of it real bad. So before the LIS came, we worked closely with the Administrative Computing people, primarily Billie Watts, and Steve La Bree from the Registrar's Office, and also Mike, what was his name, from Administrative Computing?

TB: Massey?

RO: Massey, Mike Massey, yes. Mike Massey and Billie Watts were the primary people who worked with us on reprogramming our old home-grown circulation system so that transactions could be loaded onto disk. So instead of carrying all these punch cards over to Bond Hall, we'd just carry a disk over every night. It was quite a bit of work for what turned out to be a fairly short period. It was only a couple of years or less before we had the LIS. But it was primarily something that Administrative Computing wanted to clean up. We had to take part in making the change, but they did most of the work.

It was interesting, a funny story dates back to when we still were using the punch cards, and the machines would just keep breaking down at the Circulation desk. There was a guy named Lowell, can't remember his last name, who was from IBM, and he was there so often that people thought he was one of our staff. They'd come up and ask him where something was or for help (laughing), because he was working right at the counter. That was funny. Then I also remember when the key punch machine was still in the library and IBM had to call a guy out of retirement to come fix it because they had nobody still on staff that had ever worked on one of them. (Laughing)

TB: And all of that didn't change until like 1995, when we had a barcode day to prepare for the LIS.

RO: Yes, and it was also about that time, probably 1994, when the Western Card got planned and implemented, and so the library was critical in that.

TB: Because that was critically tied to the LIS too, really, right? Because we needed a card for Circulation.

RO: Yes, we had to have barcoded cards prior to the LIS. However, the university was interested in combining more operations onto one card. The library had always had its own library card. I think I still have a copy of one or two of those at home.

TB: Yes, the original library card before that Western Card was a key punch card because it had all those little holes in it. So, talk a little bit more about the Western Card and that time.

RO: Yes, Donna Packer and Kurt Willis co-chaired a committee to make a recommendation for a Western Card, and I served on the committee as well. There were representatives from around campus. There were big ideas for a lot more places on campus to use the card. The idea was that down the road it would be for everything, like even a bank card and dorm access card, all that kind of stuff. A lot of those things never happened, but there was a lot of talk about it at the time. Still it did serve a critical thing in combining on one card functional use for Dining Services with that for the library and –

TB: And Copy Center, yes.

RO: --- and, yes, Kathy Tadlock was a part of that committee, too. So it was good change overall. It just didn't quite serve all the functions they thought it was going to at the time.

TB: So can you talk a little bit about the changes you saw overall, I guess? This question was actually from Kim, in terms of how we shifted, although I think we would always think we were student centered, but there was really a change in the library, probably, even campus wide, to really become a more student-centered library. I know with the coming of Judith, it became part of the strategic plan. She even used those words, client-centered, or student-centered. But is that really, was that new or was it just sort of suddenly more articulated? Because now we talk about it all the time, right?

RO: Yes, yes. But I think part of it was that….I don't know how much to say about certain people here, but (laughing).

TB: Just the idea of the change.

RO: Okay. So Judith Segal was hired in 1996 and came in with a lot of new ideas, many of which had good merit. But, she didn't turn out to be the best of administrators. As we talked about before, this was an era where much in libraries had been automated, and then of course we were one of the last academic libraries anywhere to automate. This was changing a lot about what traditional library jobs were, especially, I think, for professionals. One of Judith's key concepts was to get librarians out of the library to be engaged with faculty on campus, rather than concentrating too much about traditional, basic library operations. She proposed reorganizing to make librarians for the colleges.

The Reference librarians has traditionally been liaisons to particular academic departments. She meant a different focus beyond the liaisons being selectors of materials for specific disciplines. And, there was some reluctance from some librarians to make this change. But I think it was just part of the times, in the way that libraries were already fundamentally changing to being places where you didn't necessarily have to go to all the time because you could access so much online. And, of course, when we implemented the service of delivering materials to faculty offices, then faculty didn't come here hardly at all, probably until we built the café. So it was a different time. And this is skipping, we're not going in a real chronological order here, but you might remember we had a consultant in -- I want to say he was probably here around 2009.[1]

Scott Bennett, who had recently retired as the head librarian at Yale University. We hired him to evaluate and make recommendations about our spaces. He evaluated spaces in relation to what kind of services we were or should be providing. I remember a meeting he conducted where he asked the librarians: Where do you spend most of your work time? And they replied that they spent the majority of their work time inside the library. Well, where are most of the people you are supposed to be serving? Are they in the library? Well, no, not physically. So he said, why aren't you out there where they are, then?

It was that kind of attitude that I think people needed to understand. It used to be if anybody wanted anything from the library, they'd have to come to the library, and it wasn't that way anymore. And I think that was a huge change. And of course it changed faster than I think we all recognized, which often happens. You know, it is said that leaders of the country don't really lead, they take their clues from what's already going on in some part of the country and then claim it as their own. (Laughing)

TB: Right. Hurry up and follow my people.

RO: Yes. And I think that was the case then, too. So I would say yes, right around that time as more and more library materials and services became automated, then behaviors and attitudes changed.

TB: Can you tell in numbers? I mean, this is asking you to remember off the top of your head, I guess Circulation would have them anyway. But just the radical drop in numbers in terms of circulation of materials and people in the library. Because we've obviously made an effort to bring all these things like the Learning Commons into the library and develop spaces to get people back in.

RO: Yes, right. Well I don't remember the numbers. Academic library circulation numbers are never as high as, say, public libraries. That's because so much of what people were using, whether they were students or faculty, were typically academic journals. And of course we didn't allow those to circulate to students. So what is your circulation number, really? I think sometimes we didn't think about it. We were doing things in a traditional way, gathering traditional statistics and not necessarily understanding what was really happening and quantifying what we were providing. The vast majority of the acquisitions budget was being spent on journals and not on books, and that dated back to the 1980s, at least. So that wasn't a new thing. In some disciplines most of the journals were being published electronically instead of in print, which was another reason that especially faculty didn't physically come to the library.

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[1] Bennett, Scott. *Western Washington University Library consulting report*. Place of publication not identified: S. Bennett, 2009.

Rick Osen Edited Transcript – April 9, 2019
Campus History Collection

TB: So, can you think of some other changes that happened with our students or the type of students that we had, or the faculty? Just the whole way that you saw the university changing over the years? That's kind of a hard question, very wide open, but …

RO: Yes, I think we always had the advantage here that we employed a lot of students, and sometimes that clued you in to what students who weren't our employees were thinking. I think that was always an advantage for us if we wanted to use it. Listen to what their experiences were, not as a worker but as a student. I always considered student employees to be students first, and then our employees second,

TB: Can you talk a little bit about that, though, that every time minimum wage would go up, what that did to our -- well, the hiring of students.

RO: Well, yes. It was a concern for a number of years because we typically were not funded for those increases. We began continuously trying to get more Work-Study students. When I first started working with the library budget, many of the student supervisors didn't want to hire Work-Study students. Over time we convinced them they're just like any other student. But the fact is they're getting paid to work for us outside of our budget, and we have a budget problem. So I think that was a big change that kind of helped us deal with that rising wage issue, the fact that we really tried to concentrate on the Work-Study money that was available. In a lot of cases, in my remembrance, Work-Study students were some of the best students we had. Though, we always got that occasional one that thought they were being paid to study (laughing) while they were on the job.

TB: Yes. What about -- and whatever you just kind of want to share -- I feel like the university's a very big place. There's the formal channels of information sharing and how things get worked out versus an informal way. You were friends with everybody, you know, for instance Rob [Galbraith] . . . How much of the work kind of got done [in those informal channels versus more formal channels]. I guess I just feel like it seemed like you were always a really powerful guy and had a significant impact. But a lot of it seemed to me was almost like an informal thing because you –

RO: Relationships around campus are extremely important if you want to get things done. One of the things I remember learning from Jerry Boles was that you don't get things done because you ask for them. You make connections and start talking about what services you can provide or what needs you can meet, planting those ideas in people's minds. Then, when it comes time for funding you have others to speak up saying the library needs to do this and they need the money to do it. You build support and get others to advocate for you.

I think building those relationships is a big deal in order to get things done. You can hardly do anything on your own at a complex university. Even in the library, which is also complex, it's hard to do anything on your own without cooperating with other people, building relationships. I consciously tried to do that, in a way because I'm just that kind of a person anyway. But I think it helped a lot over the years in building support for things where we needed it. I always tried to appreciate the work that other people did around campus, not just in the library. It comes more naturally, I think, for some people than others, but I always found it to be the fun part of my job, to really get to know people around campus, what they do, what we can do with them, not just for them but with them. And we did a lot of good cooperative things, I think, over the years.

For example, I think we developed very good relationships with, most of the time, ATUS, and with the Facilities people. I always tried to work very closely with the Space Administration people and help them out when they needed help with something like temporary space. Because then when you ask for something, they remember that you helped them, those kind of things. I cultivated relationships with individuals in HR and in the budget office, since those areas were part of my job. I don't know if that really answered your question.

TB: Yes, I mean, that would be my observation. You kind of confirmed it.

RO: I did consciously seek out campus committees that I could serve on, because it gave me another inroad to other people who had influence that could be of assistance some time.

TB: And why don't you talk about that. You were on the University Planning committee for quite a while.

RO: I was. I was on the University Planning Council, I think it was called at the time, for seven years. And of course that's a Faculty Senate committee. I chaired the council for three years, and I believe I'm the only non-faculty person to ever chair that, or maybe to ever chair any of the faculty committees.

There were several interesting things that happened during those seven years. One of the biggest, most controversial, was the proposal to split apart the College of Arts and Sciences into two colleges. The University Planning Council got involved in holding open forums about the proposal that were well attended, with most everybody speaking against the idea of breaking the college apart. So it was a political dynamite kind of thing, which I don't know if I want to go into.

TB: That's fine, that's fine.

And what about some other changes that you saw in the library? I mean, the library has changed so much in organization. One of the fascinating things I always found, it seems like cataloguing was always the thing that was going to go away, and cataloguing is the one thing that always stays. And then, reference has kind of morphed into the Research and Writing Center. I shouldn't insert myself. But you know, that's really changed. And so any thoughts that you have about that, or what you saw?

RO: Well, I mean cataloguing is still there, but it's not the expansive department that it was at one time.

TB: It's not as expansive, but it still does critical kind of work in terms of local collections.

RO: Yes, I think in the whole what we tried to do later on is understand that the big role for cataloguing is the cataloguing of things that are special, unique to our situation, and that is where they can really make a contribution to the greater world, to make those things known to the rest of the world. The idea of copy cataloguing has changed a lot. I mean, I just look at the public library where I'm involved now. They have hardly anybody left in Cataloguing because they're getting all their materials pretty much pre-processed.

TB: Probably already comes with cards or whatever, well not even cards, but a record, online record.

RO: Yes, labeled and everything.

TB: Wow.

RO: And I think they only have two or three people that are still even involved in any kind of cataloguing. They don't get much original material, as the university does, The growth in Western's various archival and primary source materials, such as those at the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies and Special Collections, has been a major thing in the last few years. Maybe it doesn't seem like that to you, (Laughing) but the focus on it is much higher than it was several years ago.

TB: Yes, and I think my point around Cataloguing was with the putting ourselves into this shared catalog (Orbis Cascase), at the same time there's so much local information that still needs to be in the records and has to be maintained, and that ends up being Cataloguing, because you can't do it OCLC anymore.

Have you any other thoughts maybe that you do have about the difference between a public library and the academic library?

RO: Well, the clientele's much different. The university's main clientele are faculty and students, and anything else is kind of residual. One of the biggest focus areas for public libraries is early childhood learning. For instance, at the Bellingham Public Library nearly 30% of the items checked out is from the children's collection.

TB: Wow, I didn't know that.

RO: They do something like seventeen story hours a week, and every one of those is booked to capacity. So it's just more of a focus both on early childhood development and learning, and also on lifelong learning for adults and seniors like myself. And of course now, the homeless people use the public library a lot in the daytime, just to have a place to sit, and that's not something the university faces very much.

TB: I was thinking, is there a similarity though in the sense of we've expanded. It's not the same kind of expansion of social services that the public library would have, but we've really expanded our services by bringing in the Tutoring Center, and all these things kind of serve so many other needs of the people beyond just the traditional way we think about it.

RO: Right. Well really, Western's primary clientele are again the faculty and the students, and the students are very well served, I think, by co-locating services next to each other. We saw immediately after bringing the Writing Center and the Tutoring Center into the library that their visitations went up tremendously because, I think, in some cases nobody could find them before. So you have students that use those services now because not only they've found them, but maybe also for students who just became aware of the services since they were coming to the library, anyway. And I think the synergy of those services being together also improves the educational experience for students, which is the main mission of all of us at the university, regardless of where we work. So, I think as you said, that focus is a little different, since a lot of what had been traditional library services aren't quite as relevant now. I thought the university has taken a step administratively to make most of those services part of the library, because it's true of the Tutoring Center, isn't it?

TB: Yes, yes.

So what about, any other comments about the Directors or Deans or anything else when you were working with them? Also, you had a year of being Interim Dean. Was that, like, the highlight, or was that, like, oh my gosh?

RO: Well, I think in many ways the last four or five years I worked were the most fun I had, even though probably the most work I had as well. Though there were plenty of times where I had a lot of work before. When we were doing the asbestos abatement project and also doing Haggard design simultaneously, I didn't have time for anything else.

During the last few years there were obviously some problems, especially budgetary problems and some controversies over what we had to do. There were some leadership issues as well. But in many cases, I really enjoyed the last few years where I got to work with other library staff and campus personalities more closely than I had. I felt I was very well accepted, even my year as Interim Dean from the other Deans, which I appreciated. Many of them are no longer in their positions, as the campus administration has recently undergone frequent changes. Right when my time as Interim Dean was up is when the Provost changed. The new Provost was somebody with whom I'd worked and who I really respected, Provost Brent Carbajal. He took over right when Mark Greenberg got here as the library Dean.

TB: So just in your career, what are the things you're most proud of? And I want you to brag because you know a lot more than I know.

RO: I feel like I was well respected, and I'm proud of that. And that was around campus as well as the library. I think that working on Facilities projects was one of my favorite parts of things I did over the years and that many of those projects made a noticeable difference. I hope this space has worked out well.

TB: It's beautiful. It gets used all the time for non-special collections things. I mean, it's –

RO: Yes, we just hired RMC to do an upcoming project at the public library next year. There'll be some significant renovation on the main floor, and we just hired them to be our architect.

But yes, I think that was the most fun part of my job, because I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed working with the facilities folks, with the architects but also the maintenance people, those kind of folks.
There were some difficulties, off and on. Once I got in the Administration Office, I worked for seven, and if you count Mark, eight different changes in administration in, what, 21-22 years. So that was a big turnover, and in a way I had to be the constant through all of those changes. And, some of those changes were done better than others.

I'm also thinking of when we hired these two consultants[2] to come in and look at organizational culture and functions, and that was a pretty big shake up. Bela Foltin was getting ready to retire or was being steered that way. I don't know how that process affected the rest of the library, but I felt there was a big change and that it was probably needed at that time. And I think changes did take place over time. I think things are different now than they were awhile back, and I hope it's for the better.

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[2] Pitkin, Gary M. and Glenda A. Thornton, *Western Washington University Libraries: the report of consultants Dr. Gary M. Pitkin and Dr. Glenda A. Thornton*. Place of publication not identified: G. M. Pitkin, G. .A. Thornton, 2007.

TB: You might not want to answer this, so that's fine too. But was it ever kind of hard, you had all these different people, and they'd come in and they'd have all of their ideas, and you know the culture of the library. Did they kind of listen to your voice sometimes in terms of saying, well, you know, we might be able to do this a little better if we did this or whatever, or did some of them even resent -- I mean, I know that every one of them ended up thinking you were, like, the rock star. I know they all came to you, but was it ever hard to get them to listen to you?

RO: I don't think so. I mean, my style has always been that when I work with somebody new, I just try to kind of get to know them first before I start saying too much.

TB: Smart.

RO: And you're right, every one of them was different. (Laughing) They had different strengths and different weaknesses, and, even different views about what they wanted to do or not to do. And sometimes it's just trying to build that trust up first, then you go from there. There were some difficult things that happened over the years. But I would always try to be supportive, not necessarily trying to enforce a view that I had that was different, but I would try to make them aware of what that difference might be and ask them to look at it. Some were easier than others.

TB: Yes, yes. So anything else I haven't asked you that you know or something you think it's important?

RO: Oh, let me think. I think we covered quite a bit of stuff. Obviously it's hard -- when you're living with change all the time, it's hard to think back, but obviously it's a far different place now than it was in the 1980s. The campus is so much different too, you know. It's grown like crazy compared to when I first got here in the 1970s. You were here in the 1970s, and it's just a much different place, and I think the library tried to adapt and change with the changing campus, and that's good. You know, when we first got here there was hardly anything or very few things south of Red Square. I mean, there were a couple buildings –

TB: Arntzen was new when I came, yes.

RO: Yes. But all that growth down on the south campus was a major thing over the years.

TB: What about budget? How did your job evolve from budget? You would've started in -- because you even ended up with the acquisitions budget, didn't you? Even ended up with everything?

RO: Well –

TB: Donna did it, I mean, for a long time, but.

RO: Yes. When she retired, we had a combination where Jeff Purdue was working with the acquisitions budget –

TB: Collection development.

RO: -- and Julie Fitzgerald, of course, was instrumental in all that. But we did make some significant changes in the acquisitions budget because, you know, there's never enough money for acquisitions to meet faculty needs and desires. You might remember that we did this survey called *LibQual+* a couple times. I was in charge of doing the first one, and luckily I delegated Frank to be in charge of doing the second one. (Laughing) I went to a training for it at ALA before we did our first one. I heard somebody who was presenting from one of the major institutions in Texas, I can't remember if it was Texas A&M or if it was the University of Texas. But they talked about doing *LibQual+*, and they had, I believe, the third highest acquisitions budget of any institution in the country. And they still got rated low by their faculty. (Laughing) So I realized right then, you're never going to win this game.

We made big changes towards data-driven and demand-driven expenditures in the acquisitions budget during the time I was acting as Assistant Dean for Collections and Technology in addition to my regular administrative job. I then also had oversight for you guys, all at the same time.

TB: Yes, Heritage Resources for two years (2010-2012).

RO: It was during that time when the budget cuts were heavy. We faced significant cuts three years in a row. We tried to cut whatever else we could before touching the acquisitions budget, but by the third year that was all there was left to cut. That's when we really went all in on scrapping the long-standing allocation plan and turning to data-driven decision making.

First we had to convince the library selectors that this was what we needed to do. Then, working through the Senate Library Committee, we had to convince the university faculty about the fact that if we were spending X-amount of money on a subscription that was only getting X-uses, and therefore every use was costing us $100, that we couldn't continue to support that. We could purchase the faculty member an article much cheaper without subscribing to the entire title. That was a big shift in starting to make data-driven decisions versus subjective-driven decisions. Like I said, that was kind of a two-phased process we had to do. First we had to convince our own selectors that that was the way we needed to go, so that they could talk the same talk when they were talking to faculty.

Then we did the same sort of thing for books. Why are we buying these books? We've owned this book for five years now and nobody's used it. So why are we buying things on speculation when we can't afford to buy everything we want? Let's buy things only because somebody requests them.

TB: And what about Summit? Summit was probably transformational then, right, because it seems that we did it quick.

RO: It was. It was a huge change for all the libraries in the region. Our first consortium was called Cascade, which included just the six Washington state four-year institutions. Then that group joined with a consortium in Oregon to form Orbis Cascade. I'm trying to remember what year that was. This was some time right around 2000, I think, or maybe early 2000s?

TB: Probably. But I was just thinking now with the shared catalog, that's what's really phenomenal. I mean, you find it in the catalog, it almost doesn't matter who has it because if we just immediately say, if you don't have it, we'll get it, and it comes within a couple days, so it's like –

RO: Sure, yes. That was a huge change. The philosophy was that we were one big library. But, I wonder how it's doing now. I could start seeing when I was getting ready to retire, and especially the year that I attended the meetings as our Dean, that some of the Alliance's initiatives were negatively affecting the smaller schools in the Alliance. All participating institutions had to be in on some of these initiatives and purchases, the fee schedule usually set on enrollment so that if you had 10,000 students, you paid approximately 10 times more than an institution that had 1,000 students. It wasn't quite that simple, but it was roughly proportionate. Still, it was hard for some of the smaller schools who really had small budgets in comparison, to commit to something, anything new, because they just lacked the funds. You just wondered at some point, is that going to be a breaking point for the Alliance? It doesn't seem to have been yet, but who knows.

TB: A couple of those really small schools are closing, too.

RO: For the small schools, they have so much less flexibility in their budgets or at their institutions that it can be very hard for them. But the shared catalog and the resource sharing that happens within the 40 institutions, or whatever it is now, has been a big bonus overall, I think. Though I do know that when we were changing into the new system vendor here about the time I was retiring, it was a major problem. I don't know if that stuff's ever gotten ironed out.

TB: Still working on it, but yes. Anything else we haven't talked about?

RO: I'm trying to think. Well probably, but (laughing).

TB: Well if we think of something else, we can definitely add it in later.

RO: Okay.

TB: Okay, good! Thank you!

(End of audio)

Oral Interview – Additional Thoughts

Technology: We talked about how the Western Libraries were very late to adopting technology, being one of the last academic libraries nearly anywhere converting from a card catalog to an online one. However, there are three things where our library became a sort of technical leader that I'd like to point out.

1. Though we were late online adopters, our purchase of the Innovative Interfaces system led to all the state's other baccalaureate institutions also purchasing III, converting from whatever systems they were using. This, then, led to the formation of the Cascade consortium, and the eventual consolidation with Orbis, becoming the Orbis Cascade Alliance.
2. Somewhere around 1997 or 1998, Frank Haulgren brought to me news of the availability of a new interlibrary loan software system named ILLiad, developed at the University of Virginia. It took some convincing, but we talked our superiors into purchasing it. We became one of the first 15-20 adopters of it, and certainly the first in the Pacific Northwest. It turned out to be very successful, and I remember a number of regional libraries sending their ILL folks to Western to have Frank and his staff demonstrate the system for them. Eventually, ILLiad became so ubiquitous that OCLC bought it.
3. Somewhere in the early 2000s, I think, we also started a laptop checkout program, which was very common then. Funded through the Student Technology Fee, it became a smashing success, and certainly contributed to student use of the library.

Students: We also talked about the focus on students, and one very obvious thing the library has going for it, through the long-time generosity of the Hearsey family, is the Hearsey Scholarship program for deserving students who work in the library. Begun, I believe, in 1995, I was fortunate enough to chair the scholarship selection committee for the first 18 years of its existence, and it was always one of the most enjoyable parts of my job!

Being proud: Your question about what I was most proud of obviously caught me off guard. I should mention two official recognitions: the 2007 Excellence in Service Award presented to me by the Professional Staff Organization; and the President's Exceptional Effort Award in 2012. The 2007 award meant a lot to me as it came from peer employees across the campus, and was given to just one person a year. My name was engraved on a plaque with the other yearly winners, and hung in the Board of Trustees room. The President's award was special as for it I was nominated by colleagues from within the library. [I also received an award with the same title in 2004, but I think the process was different back then.]