

David Orr, Interviewed by Elizabeth Fraterrigo, November 18, 1998, 10:00 a.m.,
Room 434, Cook County Building, 118 N. Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois
Mundelein College History Project

E. Fraterrigo: I'd like to start out with just a little bit of background, if you could talk about where you grew up and where you went to school?

D. Orr: I was born in Bloomington, Illinois. My folks were from downstate Illinois. I wasn't in Bloomington long. My family moved up to Chicago, and when I was about four they moved to the suburbs. So I was really more of a suburban kid. I grew up in Lombard. I was pretty lucky. I had a really good family -- a nice, loving family. So, basically I grew up in that house all my life. You know it was the fifties and sixties, an interesting time. Totally different from today. I knew nothing compared to what kids today know.

DO: And then I went to college in Iowa. I just happened to pick a small school, Simpson College, studied history and politics and did the general liberal arts thing. I was lucky to get a fellowship to graduate school. I had intended to go to law school, but I got this fellowship so I went to Case Western Reserve in Cleveland in American Studies, where I spent two years, picked up an M.A. Never finished the Ph.D. I was studying all this stuff about American history. It was now 1968. In my view, the world was coming apart. I became much more of an activist and I guess I wondered what I was still doing in school.

DO: So I basically left Case Western, partly because I fell into an accidental teaching job, historically speaking. Because in 1968, if I had gone to my third year of graduate school, I would have stayed exempt from the military. Remember, this was the high point of the Vietnam War. By this time I was a severe critic of the war. So I took a lot of risks by not going back to the third year of graduate school, where I would have been exempt. What

happened was a nun, not a BVM -- I didn't know anything about nuns because I was not raised Catholic. I didn't have a clue except those were the kids from the other corner that had those uniforms that went to a different school on a different bus. That was as much as I knew about Catholics, so to speak. So this nun, from an order who was in one of my classes in graduate school, stopped me one day and said "Would you be interested in teaching at our college, American history and American politics?" I was in graduate school, but I was in some ways more of an activist than a student. I'd gotten very involved in a guy named Carl Stokes, who became the first black mayor of Cleveland in 1967. You know, I liked graduate school, I had a pretty good deal, but I guess I was looking for something a little more dramatic. So I said "yes." What happened is the teacher who was the professor at this small school called Notre Dame College in the Cleveland area had been called up in the *Pueblo* Incident, which was an incident off the coast of Asia someplace.* He was in the reserves, so he got called up. Anyway, I decided to [take the teaching position], so in the fall of '68, I left Chicago to go to Cleveland [unclear]. I left before the Democratic Convention and all the stuff that happened because otherwise I'm sure I would have been there. But since they started school early, I had left to go out there in mid-August.

EF: So you were home for the summer from Case Western, and you went back to Ohio to take the job?

*North Korean gunboats seized the USS *Pueblo*, a navy reconnaissance ship, in international waters in January 1968. See Glennon, Lorraine, ed., *Our Times: The Illustrated History of the Twentieth Century*, (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995), 496.

DO: Yes, I came home in the summers when I was in graduate school. It was fall of '66 to '68, I guess, and both those summers of '67 and '68, I came back, which is very relevant to Mundelein. Because my connection to Mundelein again was all accidental too, which much of life is accidental. I was finishing my first year of graduate school in Cleveland, which would have been May of 1967, looking for a summer job, heard about Upward Bound, and applied to various places in Cleveland for the Upward Program, which was a federally funded program to help educate high school kids. Kind of like the equivalent of Head Start for high school age kids. I couldn't get a job there. Someone said to me, "Well, why don't you apply for Upward Bound in Chicago, because that's where you're from?" I did. I applied several places, and I got this letter back from one of the nuns at Mundelein. It was my first experience -- I didn't know Mundelein from a hole in the wall.

DO: [It was] a very interesting letter. And I don't remember if it came from Sister Kathleen O'Brien or Sister Margaret Thornton, but one of the sisters who worked with Upward Bound and the History department at Mundelein. The letter was written something like this -- Because I thought I'd be what they called, like, a counselor. I didn't know which was a men only, woman only school, and [counselors] were graduate kids who worked with the students-- And the letter came back: "We looked at your resume, we see you've had a lot of American history. We're looking for someone who could teach fifty, sixty high-risk young girls from the ghetto, so to speak, teach them about American history" and so forth. And so I worked really hard -- In fact I wish I still had it. You know, you're a twenty-one-year-old kid trying to come up with creative ideas, how to teach history that you thought was more meaningful than the stuff you'd been getting, because I

had some great profs who were very boring, I guess. I wrote back, and they hired me sight unseen.

DO: So my [first] experience with Mundelein was not as a college teacher but through this program that was taking place at Mundelein College. I did that in the summers of 1967, '68, and '69. That was a marvelous experience. Talk about teaching experiences. Mundelein was a great experience for me at the college level: the Experimental College, the Weekend College, the returning students, the whole shebang was pretty exciting for me. But this Upward Bound was a knock-out. It was a wonderful experience.

EF: What about it made it wonderful?

DO: The kids were wonderful, the nuns who organized it at Mundelein were what I'd call kind of a progressive bunch who were willing to experiment, willing to -- You know, when you're taking maybe a sixteen-year-old kid from the ghetto, in which most of their classmates would never go on to college and so forth, how do you make them more interested in whether or not Abraham Lincoln did this or that? We had the ability to experiment -- I remember one experience. It was small in the sense -- We weren't caught up with a lot of red tape, which was a big problem for most teachers in public schools, and in a lesser sense in universities, but still there -- So I remember one thing that we often did, and I guess because I was young it was easy to do these experiments. I don't know where -- If I copied them from somebody else. But I remember one class in which we were trying to get across what eye-witness testimony was. It had something to do with the American history experience. Three students from another class came into our

room and basically tore up the room intentionally. What they did is, they came in and picked up some chalk and threw it, they picked up a couple of erasers and threw them, actually pushed -- this was all women now -- pushed a couple of their colleagues. I mean, not a fist-fight, but they were probably in and out of the room in less than twenty seconds. Then we asked the people who were in the classroom to identify who it was. And of course, the experience, which was interesting now, which was historically valuable, is that they couldn't. They misidentified, even racially -- they misidentified black for white -- and so the experience was that, you know, people could go to their death for a misidentification or something. I'm just giving you an example.

DO: It was a good experience because it was a whole experience. It wasn't just some people that came together once a week for three hours. It was every day, fairly intense. You were teacher, counselor, advisor, everything. I also remember that it was that first year in 1967 that they had this big trip at the end of the summer for the kids, that we all went along with. This was the faculty, and about twenty or thirty Mundelein students, who served as tutor/counselors. Because the kids lived in the dorm with the college women, [who] were kind of like advisors. It was a very well-done program and a very good program that unfortunately has not been -- It's not totally out, but there's a lot of cut-backs financially. That summer we finished up by going to Washington D.C., where the kids got to actually meet with Robert Kennedy. It was the year before he was assassinated.

DO: That was my first experience at Mundelein which was so good because my teaching experience in Cleveland had been with a very conservative, almost right-wing reactionary group of sisters, and so it did not leave a good impression on me. There are lots of

stories, that you probably wouldn't be interested in, so then to the experience with the BVMs for someone who actually wasn't Catholic and did not have the wealth of -- the breadth of knowledge about either nuns or Catholics or whatever, it was a very good experience to see these Kathleen O'Briens and the Margaret Thorntons and the others who participated in this program. So, to tie that together, that's how I got hired to be a faculty member of Mundelein. I did that teaching year that I had started at Notre Dame College. A year later, [Mundelein] needed a history faculty. In fact, I think it was maybe when Prudence Moylan went off to study or travel or something. Again, I think it was Kathleen O'Brien who was really behind it -- who has since left the order -- but they hired me to be a full-time history faculty [member] at Mundelein. So that brought me to Mundelein in the fall of '69. Not just in the summer program which was just held at Mundelein, but actually to be Mundelein faculty. That's how these things worked out.

EF: You referred to the "progressive bunch." Were there individual people that you would point to?

DO: Well, I think a lot of the folks around, particularly in terms of the sisters, a lot of the folks around the Weekend College -- Mary Griffin, who passed, Mary DeCock -- who were interested in, what you might say, progressive educational theory. How do you achieve the substance that is necessary? How do you make sure that students have a certain knowledge of content of a subject area so they can succeed? But [it] also tries to deal, I guess, with a little more experimental and motivational techniques. Everybody's

concerned about it. There's always that tension. It's not all black and white. There's always that tension there.

DO: Mundelein, long before I got there, was always experimenting. When I first came in '69, they had a structure in which you -- I was teaching History I and History II, and we had sixty or seventy people in the classroom, and they experimented with team teaching. Mundelein was a place where -- I think one of the reasons it was known to be a good college with generally good faculty was because they took the teaching seriously. There wasn't the pressure to publish. I'm sure there's more of it today, particularly because it's part of Loyola. And there's something to that. In my view, it's very valuable for the faculty to have the time to study more in their own field and learn, but good teaching is every bit as valuable -- in fact it's more valuable in some cases -- to students than the individual scholarship of the professor. Working at Upward Bound even before was kind of an introduction to Mundelein that proved to be experimental...

[interrupted by telephone]

EF: Let's talk about the City in Crisis course that you launched in the 1970s.

DO: Oh man, there were so many great things. It's hard to say which were the greatest, but that was a wonderful experience for me and a wonderful experience for the teachers. We basically copied something that some Loyola profs -- I think Russ Barta worked with somebody at Loyola to try and do something like this. I'm not sure why it didn't get off the ground, but they asked me to work on that as soon as I got [to Mundelein]. It was great for me, because it's what I wanted to do.

DO: What made it so successful -- and by successful I mean that the students learned a lot and they loved it, most of them -- was that it was more intense. It was not just getting together for three hours. Because partly what I'm saying is there are different ways to teach. A really brilliant lecturer can offer an awful lot to students, you know, even if it's a three-hour or one-hour segment. But the most real education goes way beyond that. Real education is befriending -- It's knowing someone so that what you could actually say to the student is "I care about you, you're a good person, but you really have to pay attention to this because you just don't get it." When you develop a certain amount of personal relationship where you can go beyond -- Because most learning is not just memorizing dates and stuff. Most learning is deeper. It's "how do I come to make decisions about life [unclear] and the world?" In some ways, real learning is personal. So these experiences, particularly at Mundelein, a lot of them -- My view, just knowing some of the students -- keeping in touch, only with a few of them -- But other experiences related to some of these educational experiments, or the fact that the political swirl around Mundelein -- There was the strike in [1970]. All that stuff. [They] were very valuable learning experiences.

DO: Back to [the City in Crisis]. What was valuable about it, what made it successful -- it was intense. It was every day of the week -- a summer school program -- from 9:00 to 12:00. In many cases because people were available and I was available, it continued. So you might have class from 9:00 to 12:00 and then go have lunch and keep talking. The idea was experiential. You know, the "City in Crisis." Let's get to see it. So we would have many guests. We had John Stroger, who's now the County Board president and Howard Saffold from the Afro-American Patrolmen's League. We went to the county jail. We

went to city council. In fact we went to city council when the older Mayor [Richard J.] Daley made his famous “son speech” and there was almost a big riot in the city council. He was very angry at young people and sat and stared at us for hours, being so angry at young in general. That was the day Dick Simpson challenged him on the floor of the city council. I believe that was 1969.

DO: We went all these places, met with community organizers, went to community groups. And the students had to analyze all these experiences -- what people said, and different opinions, and so forth. It was a very, very good experience. We did that for just about ten summers. What made it special was that it was experiential and they had more time. And the other thing is the camaraderie. Like I said before, learning can be personal. The camaraderie that developed among the students every year was fascinating. Because in many cases what you had was older students -- by that I mean they might be thirties and forties -- and younger students. You even had a spattering of males in there. All the classes were exciting for them. The class of 1975 had these fascinating young men, and a relationship developed between [them and] a group of thirty-five to forty-year-old women. I’m not talking about so much a personal [relationship], but in terms of just the exchanging of ideas. Anyway, it was a fun program. People learned a lot. And it was great for me, to learn about politics in the city.

EF: [City in Crisis] was something in place before you came to Mundelein?

DO: No, it had been an idea. There was a brochure that I think Loyola had talked about. Let’s put it like this: if it ever happened at Loyola, I’m not sure what happened with it, but it

wasn't functioning when I got there. So they said, "Here's something we'd like [you] to think about," and I guess I pretty much looked at what they had done before and schemed something which would be experiential. I mean, a lot of people were doing this kind of thing. It's not so unique. Ours was unique in the sense that it had this intense all-morning session which in some cases led to two or three in the afternoon. Quite a few of the classes, since this was their only class -- they were getting six hours credit -- they could stick around.

EF: Do you have any recollections of what was called "Con-Cur," the Conference on Curriculum?

DO: I do. Again, just another example of what I'd say was Mundelein faculty's commitment to continuous reevaluation of what we're teaching and how best to go about that experience. Oh yes, I was involved in a lot of that stuff, and again, it was a positive experience. It seems like many of us, who -- We were paid very little at Mundelein. I started at six thousand dollars in the fall of '69. [Con Cur] was another one of those examples of people who were so committed to education and particularly teaching that they would take this, what you might call extra time, to debate these ideas. There were always differing views. I'm sure there were people who thought that people like me who, came in to Mundelein having a goatee -- I started at Mundelein when I was twenty-four years old and looked about eighteen. Many of my students looked older than me. And I'm sure many of the faculty felt, "Who is this dippy kid that knows nothing?" Before I was talking about nuns who were progressive. People like Bill Hill and some of the others, Mike

Fortune -- a lot of the folks like that -- were just people that were a hundred percent committed. It didn't matter what they got paid. It didn't matter how many committees they had to sit on -- how many classes they had to teach, which took them away from the personal research they would have liked to do. They were willing to do it. The Con-Cur was just another example of that.

EF: What was the goal of Con-Cur?

DO: It's been a while. I think the goal at that point was to review the curriculum and try and make change. What is the best thing we can teach and the best way to go about teaching it? Trying to think about who the students were at that time in the early seventies. I guess, overall, it was a curriculum reevaluation.

EF: One of the things that came out of [Con-Cur] was the Experimental College. Did you have a role in shaping that? Do you know what its goals were?

DO: All this stuff kind of fits together. Just think of this: it's 1969, '70, '71. It's partly a reflection of the sixties. You've got students who are saying, you know, "Why do I have to take these particular courses, or in this particular order? I can learn better if you just let me do some of these things. Or maybe I shouldn't be graded in all this stuff, because then I'm trying to focus on this rather than" -- You know, it's the kind of thing that poor students can use all the time to try and get out of work. But this time at Mundelein, what you really had was good students who were on the edge. Remember, I attribute it to the

sixties. Good students who were on the edge of adulthood. And progressivism or even radicalism -- Because all this swirled around them, you know, the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war, all the youthful energy created by all that stuff, including the youthful disappointments at all the horrible things that were happening in '68, '69, '70. So you had that building.

DO: David Crosby in the English faculty was kind of the ringleader, and I was his side-kick. I really can't remember if there were many other faculty involved directly. I think it tended to be mostly us. I'm probably insulting some others that had a role, but not maybe as dramatically. The goal was, "Can we achieve the same -- or better, ideally -- level of education, with some measuring of what someone is learning, without the focus on grades, and 'you've got to go to this particular classroom' or whatever?" Again, none of that's totally unique. I mean, there's very traditional professors who say "I don't care if you come into my lectures. If you can pass the test, fine." The main experience of all that, besides, what I'd call the countercultural element to it, which was important at the time, was that it was a much greater burden on the students. I think they came to realize that. Freedom is a very, very difficult thing, and most of us, while we say we want it, would love to have people make our decisions for us. I think for all the students that was a real challenge. For many of the students who were very capable, it was a really great experience. For others, it was a real struggle, because, "If I don't have to necessarily go to that class, or if I don't have to do it this way, I've got to decide for myself how I'm going to achieve these ends." That's tough. A wonderful experience, but very, very tough.

EF: What other options did students have if they didn't attend class? What other things could they do?

DO: Well, the goal of this is that they were -- with their colleagues, their fellow students, and with the faculty, which I think was mostly Crosby and I -- to create their own plan. That's what's so difficult. In other words, we weren't saying, "Well just don't go to class. If you're not going to go to class, and you're interested in history" -- I don't want to emphasize the not going to class, because that really wasn't too relevant. It was more like, "How are you going to achieve the goals that you want to [achieve]? How are you going to be knowledgeable so that you could be passing these tests? So that you really could be knowledgeable about twentieth-century U.S. history?" for example. It's kind of like independent study and tutorials. They would set some of their own goals, and they would set projects, and they would have to present those projects to the whole group, and then the group would have collective criticism of their peers as well as the faculty. There's where they brought in other faculty, because maybe one of the students was doing an elaborate thing with Mary Griffin. Okay, so then Mary Griffin would be brought into this analysis.

DO: Then, one of the most exciting things, at the end of the year, or at the end of term or whatever -- they would have to be putting on these demonstrations. One of the students was an artist, so obviously her final presentation was artwork. Others were English, so then it's something they had written about. Others were social studies [or] social-science type students who had done some sort of experiment. And that was a lot of pressure on

them. Again, the goal was for people to be setting their own agenda, with criticism from caring individuals -- their colleagues in this experiment, as well as the faculty.

DO: It was the kind of thing that worked particularly well for some of the students who had a good grounding. I think it was more difficult for freshmen to join, who wouldn't quite admit it -- Some might have joined because maybe they wanted to be cool. Some of the students had a hard time because they would give us excuses, like "I want to set my own agenda, blah, blah, blah," and in some cases, [they're] just trying to avoid facing up to the fact that [they] don't write well enough. So the difference was that you had a smaller collective group that you could deal with in a freer atmosphere. You didn't have to necessarily meet at nine-thirty in the morning. You could all meet at four in the afternoon and go for two hours, or whatever.

DO: It was a good experiment. I think it worked with most students. I think the drawbacks were for those students who were perhaps not as grounded, and couldn't deal with the freedom, because maybe they didn't have the -- One of the students who we gave a hard time, this was probably the third or fourth year -- I don't even remember how long it lasted, but it wasn't in the first year or two. All the students have turned out pretty successful, but one of them who was kind of problematic was a guy named Les Mueller. I'm sorry if I'm butchering his name. Les was a character. We all gave Les a hard time, and Les has now gone on to get various psychiatric degrees. He's just done very well. The guy is a bright guy who learned a lot, but he was trying to escape. He couldn't deal with discipline as well as he should have, but you know, he came around.

DO: That's just something I'd love to know. How these students came out and what many of them actually felt about it. Because I think most of them would have good feelings.

Some would have mixed feelings. Some would say, "Well, I know I learned some things, but I might have been better off if I just was in a rigid situation too." Most of us realize that real education is some blend of creative and finding your own direction as well as just good, old-fashioned, "Hey, I want to listen to this professor because I know I could learn a lot just listening to him."

EF: [The Experimental College] offered a non-traditional way to earn a degree, or to qualify for a degree. How did students in the more "mainstream" curriculum at Mundelein view the Experimental College?

DO: I guess I have no way of knowing. I don't think that we did surveys. My guess is -- and it's just a guess -- is a variety of things. Many didn't pay much attention. Those that did probably had a variety of views, thinking "Oh those lucky stiff," in some ways, and others saying, "No, I don't want to be a part of that." I think part of it would have been -- Like I said, it's a counterculture -- I think they would have said, "Oh those are the students that are" -- I don't know the words. Was it perceived as a radical experiment?

DO: You've got to understand, [it's the] early seventies, it's a countercultural time. Crosby is a long-haired, full-bearded professor. Always seen as, what you might say, a maverick at Mundelein, for lots of different reasons. I was very young. I guess my hair was much longer then -- not as long as Crosby's. But you had that, and you had some of the students who were more free-spirited. So I guess there was some of that, you know, "What the heck are they doing there?" Some with envy, some with disdain. But I don't remember much -- You know, people just "do your thing." If there was a lot of thought

I wasn't fully aware of it. I wouldn't be surprised if what I'm describing had less reaction to "Is someone really learning this or not?" It [was] more like, "Who is this group that maybe sits out on the lawn looking like a bunch of hippies?" That probably affected thought more than the quality of someone's project or the work they were actually doing.

EF: You mentioned before a strike on campus. How was that related to the antiwar movement?

DO: Yes. It was, for me, a very exciting time. I came full-time [to Mundelein] in the fall of '69. And that's when there was the -- in terms of the Vietnam War -- that many campuses were really getting active.

[end of side one, tape one]

DO: One of the things that was so wonderful at Mundelein, both for students as well as for faculty like me, is that we had all our fights, but it was a learning community. So when I refer to that first year particularly, because the strike took place, I believe, in the spring of 1970 -- I had only been there a few months, and again I looked -- You take your Bill Hills and your Mike Fortunes and your Russ Bartas and all these people who were mature adults, and I was not only young, but even younger looking -- The value of that was, many people in academics -- and I think the people that I like -- they believe in the value of discourse, the value of intellectual debate. Yet in many places in our society, in our politics, and in many cases our universities, there is a paucity of real debate. People are as cowardly there as they are in other places. So to have this full-fledged debate [among]

students and faculty -- "Should we do this? Should we have a strike? Wait a second, if we have a strike that's not fair to the ones who are going to graduate. Or that's not fair to this. Well, but on the other hand, at a time like this when people are dying and they shouldn't be, we've got to change the rules."

DO: It's just all those debates, and the campus was full of them. I remember all sorts of situations concluded with tears, with people just legitimately trying to struggle. Some of the students that I got to know, and still am familiar with -- Mary Ann Kroger and some of these folks -- this was part of their lives. Nancy Zak, who graduated in '70, who I'm still in touch with, was one of the leaders. I even think we had a spy on campus. Some guy who was always trying to push the envelope. I think many of us felt that he was really a set-up, trying to create a problem.

DO: But the campus was alive. I would never say that all the things that were done were right, but it was a very dramatic time. Many people look at the sixties or some of these elements, and I just don't think they have a proper historical perspective. Sure, there were people that maybe went along with the demonstrations because they just wanted to go along. You know, it was the thing to do. But the nice thing about Mundelein, particularly with this whole strike notion, was a very legitimate debate [took place]. And it's hard with hindsight to know what's the right side. Do you actually shut down the university more or less to accomplish your purpose? Or is it better to keep things going? The nice thing about Mundelein is that there were choices, and there was debate. There were a lot of angry and upset people. A lot of experiences like that, and again, this was my first year there.

DO: In fact, there was a very dramatic group, mostly Loyola students, that were very, very talented actors and actresses, [unclear] and I remember about that time they were performing *Viet Rock*, which was an antiwar play. One of the more interesting experiences, as a twenty-four, twenty-five-year old kid, whatever I was -- Sometime during the spring of '70, apparently one of their cast members had to leave. So they asked me to join them. They were doing performances at Old Orchard, or Mill Run Theater, or something, for one final weekend. And I did. I didn't have a clue. I was extremely uptight. These were very free-spirited juniors and seniors, you know. The hard thing for me since I was a twenty-four-year old single male, with all these women around -- I think really, what you needed to do was, sometimes, you put up these walls. It's contradicting partly what I'm saying, because I really believe you've got to be personal, but you still had these walls. With my friends, I might let loose and be a character, but with students, you had these walls. So this time, being with this group that was very free-spirited, participating in this play, in which the men were only dressed to the waist -- It was a theater in the round, and I had very few lines. The one line I had was profanity. But it fit in with that whole experience that was going on.

DO: It simmered down, but [the strike] had lasting implications -- The particular strike, there were repercussions from it. But I look at the positive side. That people struggled legitimately -- honestly -- with what to do, and they all got through it one way or another. I think most of them -- Well, I probably shouldn't say that. Probably most activists felt it was a valuable time in their life. As to some of these students who felt, "Hey, what the heck is going on?" Whether they'd look back with hindsight, and say "Well, it was

legitimate intellectual discussion” or would just say “It was a bunch of crap,” I don’t know. But it was a very intriguing time.

EF: Do you feel that the faculty and administration supported things like the strike and campus protest?

DO: Well, I think, again, you always had a mixed bag there. But even those that I might have differed with or fought with or argued with, I respect them. I was a young kid who was caught up in this stuff, and more willing to rock the boat than others. Sister Ann Ida Gannon, for example, who was a wonderful president and prime mover -- I’m sure Ann Ida thought, “My God, who is this crazy kid?” at times. We fought sometimes over the years over political things, but I respect her, and I hope she respects me. I think that’s what I’d say about it. That it was an open, intellectual debate in which I give the school and I give the BVMs credit.

DO: Because they were on the edge, as a group. Some might have been much more conservative -- philosophically or politically -- than others, but remember, this is a place not only with all these things we talked about going on. This is a place where they’re coming out of habit. This is a place where they’re standing forward on many things. There’s the whole issue of choice. Remember, this is before *Roe v. Wade*. There were women seeking abortions and there were faculty, including probably nuns, that were assisting. This was a place, right or wrong, I think, where you just had a lot of people with humanitarian values committed to education. So it doesn’t matter whether somebody was right or wrong or whether or not somebody was more liberal or conservative. Even

though we fought about these things, there was respect that I really appreciate, whether it was with more traditional sisters or more progressive ones...

EF: Let's switch gears for a second and talk about the Weekend College. You were one of five faculty members that put together the original curriculum. What were some of the guiding principles you worked with when you were putting together the program?

DO: Well, it's kind of the similar things that we've said. I'm sure the others remember it all more... Part of it was curriculum, and there I just don't have the recall right now to give enough detail. But it was a curriculum we thought was relevant for them. We're talking about a certain population of people who were going back to school. Mostly women, but not all, who -- Let me put it like this. I always liked this. I remember, I read a book with this title in it, and it always struck me as who these [students were], particularly in the first couple of years of the Weekend College. We knew we were looking for people who in many cases had jobs, and in a sense they had a "hidden wound." The hidden wound was, they didn't think they were as good as they should be -- whether it would be internally or what others see -- because they didn't have that college degree. It's easy to say, "Well you're the same person, you just haven't finished all this course work." But there was this hidden wound, which partly led to the tremendous energy and commitment that these students had. You know, compared to some of the eighteen-year-olds -- that "Hey, I'm here because I've got to be here." It was kind of intriguing.

DO: So it was partly geared knowing these people needed a lot in a short amount of time. They don't have a lot of time. They will not listen to a lot of irrelevant stories from

faculty or others. They don't want to hear their classmates. They want to study and learn. They want a different experience. Maybe when you're thirty-six, and you've got a job, and you've got kids -- So it was geared toward recognizing that to be successful in the Weekend College, you had to do a lot on your own. A lot less spoon-fed, in other words, because you didn't have as much class time. The bottom line was, you had to arrange the curriculum where you give them a certain amount in a limited amount of time. There was a lot of debate over this. Yet they had to do more than a normal student would do because there's less class time, and it's jammed all -- Besides, their worlds are -- They have less time than the average younger student anyway. So it was the whole student we were looking at.

DO: And it was the whole advisory part. All of the five of us had a very serious advisory role. What's true in all life, particularly in education, is this other part -- on the edge of academics -- [which] is so crucial. The advisory relationship -- how to help you with something, how to work out things. It was just such an exciting experience. In my case, I was heading up -- We had these different directions, I guess. At some point, I don't remember if it was [the first year] or not. I headed up the Community Studies part of it, where we kind of linked some of the academic experiences together, to try and integrate them, which is what good faculty are always trying to do.

DO: Working with these students who were so committed. I just think of those first couple of classes, who were so wonderful and excited. And then advising them. I had some incredibly talented students. I lost touch with a lot of them. I get in touch with some of them. In fact, the sad thing about Mundelein becoming Loyola is I just think there's

probably less interest in these kinds of reunions. I'd love to see an [Experimental College] reunion or a Weekend College reunion, that are targeted to that.

DO: But the bottom line -- to start the whole thing -- is that Mundelein had enrollment problems like every small school at the time. By having enrollment problems, the powers that be had to say, "Well, you folks over here, we may not always want to listen to you, but if you can come up with something, we'll listen now." See what I'm getting at? They say, "Okay, here's a chance for you crazy folks"-- Mary Griffin and Mary DeCock -- and so there's an opportunity for us. Because, like I say, we were these people who were always plotting. Is there a way that we can do some educational experiment that works? This was a very practical one. This was a financially successful one for the school. Mary Griffin was a primary researcher, and we knew that there had been this weekend college experience, but never a Weekend College in Residence. That was partly the element that we added.

DO: That adds to the whole advisory -- In a sense it's also revolutionary with women, because many of these women were married. "Leave hubby with the kids for the weekend. What the hell? What is this? Let's have a little equity here." You've got to jam it into a weekend, you don't have a lot of time, so we added the residence part. Because why should they be spending hours going back and forth? You know, Friday night class and home -- [The residence aspect] was a very popular thing that was just intriguing too, because many of these were women with kids.

DO: It was a total experience. It was an educational experiment -- partly because the school needed the enrollment. It fit perfectly with the times, too, because people wanted to move more quickly. Why should these talented people take seven years to get through? See,

you have to break down those barriers where everybody has to do it this way [taps fist on desk] one, two, three, four, five. Bull! If they can achieve the level of knowledge sufficient to someone justifiably getting a degree, why not let them do it in a different way if we believe they're learning? We clearly believed they did, at least most of them. It was just very exciting. I think that hidden wound thing always -- These people were hungry. They were hungry for the recognition. Many of them, frankly, were a lot more talented than most of the B.A.s I knew. But they had this wound, and they wanted to prove to themselves and others. It was great teaching them, great advising them, and of course they brought interesting experiences. If it's a business class, or whatever class, these were people that were out doing this stuff.

EF: In your advisory role, did these issues of marriage and family come up?

DO: Oh, sure. In fact one of the most interesting students in the first year I had was a woman, a very talented writer. I lost touch with her. I think she went on to write some things. She's been published. [She] left her three kids. [She] left them. In fact, I think one of her books or essays that she was working on at that time was "What do I say to my children, as to why I had to leave?" Of course, that was exceptional but that was just someone in that first group. But that whole issue -- At this time you're still -- Like I said, it's somewhat a counterculture. There's still a little bit of that in the sense that -- not that it's gone, but there's always tension in terms of how close one can be. How far one can go in terms of discussing things with another person. I think many people at that time were ripe to discuss things. I didn't see many inhibitions with women who were dealing with the

male faculty. Dan [Vaillancourt], Bill [Hill], and I think all of us experienced the whole thing. Not only "How can I get through this, how do I learn this, how do I study that? But yes, if there were things that affected [Weekend College students] , it came up. Because it was an atmosphere in which that was okay. Yes, there was a lot of that. That's why I think it was important to remember there's all these other social elements going on. Did it start in '74?

EF: Yes. '74

DO: '74, '75. The women's movement was beginning to pick up steam. There were women that would bring that into it -- there was a few men too -- but, you know, the spouse having to take care of the kids while I'm here. [unclear]

EF: How would you describe the rapport between the students in the Weekend College?

DO: You mean the students among themselves?

EF: Among themselves. Was it different from the regular student body?

DO: Again, I just saw so many positive things. I'm sure there was negative. I think they built a lot of friendships. They were probably less interested, at that age, let's say in recognition or approval from their classmates. So it's like "These people I like, I'll sit with them, have coffee with them, talk about"-- I saw a lot of very good relationships

develop, some of them lasting. I think they basically got along well because they had this collective goal, they wanted to learn and learn fast. They were serious about it. The point was, you could befriend people, or you didn't have to. Some of it was very interesting because not everyone was in residence. It was just intriguing -- whether it was in class sometimes or if it was more the advising part -- to hear in particular these women talk about how they were in the dorm last night, and they went over to the local tavern here, and they had their nine o'clock [class], and then they called home... Just lots of stories about how they developed camaraderie. They could do that or they didn't have to. They'd have their room, they could go to sleep, and do their work and be gone, and no one bothered them.

EF: Some of the courses that you designed and taught -- Movements in Welfare Capitalism, and Radicalism in the U.S. -- how did you see these relating to the bigger picture outside the classroom? What was the impetus behind them?

DO: [laughs] I think for all of us, in fact, it's partly what you want to do, as long as you can give -- Nobody could ever teach all of American history, or all of English History, or all of English 101. So you always want to have a certain set of principles, whatever the content is that you're trying to achieve. I think most of us like to vary things. Again, a younger guy, in this case, who was looking for ways to teach the same subject -- the larger American historical experience -- but in ways that maybe were left out sometimes. Maybe that I'd felt I could make more relevant. Radicalism. Here we are in the middle of the war, so there's all these interesting experiments in the U.S. -- Welfare capitalism. Where

did that one fall? In some ways it's hard to -- I mean some people might say "you're nuts" -- that your tampering too much. But the more positive side is that you're willing to put time into playing with curriculum, playing with different ideas and books, and what you may use. You're trying to teach so many things. There's almost no such thing as -- You can't teach everything.

DO: When I started we had History I and History II. When you're doing that you decide which things of all this history you're going to talk about in History I and II. And part of what's going on in all those years is women will say, "Wait a minute, we're not very much a part of History I and II," or African Americans, or later, Latinos. There's always this revisionism stuff going on, if you want to call it that. Always different approaches. I think part of this is just partly method, partly content. Let's look at some of the things that aren't discussed as much: labor in American history, welfare capitalism as kind of another way to look at economic systems more carefully than we have.

DO: I think a lot of it reflects a desire on my part to learn more about teaching. Study up on those things, study up on labor history. Okay, "now let's teach it." There was a lot of experimentation. I laugh about it. In fact, I still get a kick that I actually taught a religion course. I team taught a course called History of Evil -- I think that was the title -- with Bill Hill. All these educational experiments are not easy. It's not an easy thing to team teach something. "Oh my God, my colleagues are going to know how much I don't know about everything?" You know, faculty are very weird that way. As much as they know or don't know, they always feel like they should know more, thinking, "Oh, my God, everyone's going to see how much I don't know." That was great experience. I got a

kick out of the fact that I actually taught a course where religion credit was received. It was a jointly taught course.

EF: Were the administration and the other faculty receptive to all these experiments? You've sort of alluded to that.

DO: Well, like I said before, I'm sure some of the faculty thought we were nuts. But it was a supportive enough atmosphere. In other words, clearly, a lot of faculty might have said, "Oh my god, what's Orr up to with this Experimental College?" Certainly, they're thinking, "Well, you know, he seems to be concerned about his students and they seem to like his class, and boy, that City in Crisis seems to be working, and the Weekend College seems to be really working." So you may have personal differences, and you may have academic or ideological differences. I'm sure there's people that thought that -- The strike, just appearances -- you know, maybe long hair and fraternizing with students more than some people would like. We had classes where we'd go over to Hamilton's, a local tavern over there, and sit around and discuss things. But I felt -- again the Mundelein culture -- no matter how conservative one might be particularly politically, was a pretty open culture. Somewhat live and let live. There may have been some nagging here and there, but again these are women that were constantly in flux, partly because the order had changed so much. You know there was fewer nuns to go around and they were experimenting and they were going out in the world. Increasingly, some of their key players were leaving. Sister Kathleen O'Brien, I think about, she left the order. Mary Griffin leaving the order --

[telephone interruption]

[end of side two, tape one]

[Orr acknowledges that he has only a short time left for the interview. He and the interviewer agree to limit themselves to a few additional questions.]

EF: Can you talk about your activities in Rogers Park -- The Farwell Area Neighbors, and Rogers Park Community Council -- how did that fit into your experience at Mundelein?

DO: Again, I keep talking about the human experience. I think all these things are related. For me, for example, here's someone who's always interested in history and politics. I teach it. The City in Crisis is politics. I'm now living in the Rogers Park neighborhood on a full time basis -- when I came in the summer of '69 I was there. I was a professor and activist. I would see myself, at least from the graduate school days, as an activist. I think it fit with my view of the world, and my view of education and activism. I gradually got more and more involved, pretty much as soon as I got to Rogers Park. I got politically involved with what you might call the anti-machine progressive forces that led to a lot of meeting of people in the neighborhood. Farwell Area Neighbors was just another one of those steps, since I happened to live there, about people needing to organize locally to get more for their neighborhood. Doing that -- Then, most of the organizing was with, what you might call, the progressive political movement.

DO: Again, at Mundelein, the culture was good to me, because in 1974 I was campaign manager for a good friend of mine [Mike Kreloff] as he ran for alderman, and I think I had a limited schedule because of that. That's interesting because the fall of '74 I was

campaign manager, plus it was the beginning of Weekend College, come to think of it. It must have been a pretty crazy time. So again, I think it all fits well. I think to the extent that people either liked my teaching or respected it, the ones who probably appreciate it more were students who also saw a value in activism beyond the classroom, in which you did a little of what you preached about. That probably was an attractive quality.

EF: From the students' perspective.

DO: Yes. In the same way that if your science prof is in the process of doing all these neat experiments that you find intriguing, that's valuable. So that was just a progression. [I became] gradually more and more involved on the political front, until I just decided I'd become the candidate. Once I did that I just had to make the decision that I would be a full-time alderman, which means I couldn't keep up my full-time job at Mundelein. I had to give up tenure, which was -- I had to fight very hard for tenure so that was not an easy decision, but... that's just the way it had to be.

EF: Let's talk about the campus just for a second. What are your recollections about the actual physical space, the Skyscraper building itself?

DO: Well, I have more identity with what we called [unclear] -- the library -- because that's where my office was for so many years. Mostly when I think of the Skyscraper, I think of some classrooms -- not particularly attractive rooms and stuff. But good experiences, a warm environment. I think of the cafeteria, the larger cafeteria, the faculty cafeteria.

There were tense times [unclear]. One of the best times for me was a bunch of my buddies and I would rent Mundelein's gym to play basketball. I met some wonderful people that way until my knees got too bad. We did that for a long time. I think a lot of the library, because I had my office there so long -- down there in the basement in those little, teeny-weeny carols, whatever they called them. I think of Piper Hall for some of the parties, and way back during the early times, playing drums with a group in the basement of Piper Hall. Very embarrassing.

EF: Do you have any thoughts on the affiliation of Mundelein and Loyola?

DO: I really don't feel like I know much because I've been gone. I think that, in some ways, it's too bad just because at Mundelein, part of the stuff that I'm talking about, which made Mundelein special, was the closeness. It was the commitment for this relatively [small] number of faculty to this number of students, and I think some of that's probably lost. I assume it is. And not to blame Loyola, just -- that's what happens, you know, the bigger you get. I'm certainly glad that Loyola kept on the vast majority of faculty. But when you lose certain identities -- there's nothing wrong with the big universities -- but there's something valuable in that smallness and the commitment to educating women. I've fought on both sides of that for a long time. It was always an issue, whether it should be exclusively women or not, or whatever. By and large I think it was a very good experience for women. I don't think it was a particularly sheltering experience as some of us might have thought at one time or another.

DO: So I think it's probably lost some of that. I don't know if it has the experimental quality -- although that's lesser anyway around the globe, so to speak. But I don't feel like I know much. I just know I wish they kept better track of alumnae, and I wish I got invited to more of the events, because I'm not in very good touch. Now and then someone will say, "Well gee, why didn't you come to the class of '71 [reunion]?" or whatever, and I'll say "I didn't know about it." Other than that, education is still going on. I'm not close enough to have a clue. There's still good faculty, I know, that are both traditional Loyola profs and former Mundelein faculty.

EF: It sounds like you really had a good experience at Mundelein. Do you ever miss it?

DO: Well, not a lot in terms of missing it. I had a very good experience and I think toward the mid- to late seventies I was feeling like, this is really good but I need something more than just maybe the full-time teaching. Probably the best thing for me is that I should be doing more part-time teaching. I haven't done a class since I taught at Columbia College ten years or eleven years ago now. Yes, I'll do guest lectures or whatever, and I'll talk with students here and there. But I don't think I miss it too much as a profession. The ideal for me would be some sort of balancing of what I'm doing in the political arena with some sort -- if I could arrange it -- some sort of appointment in a university where I wasn't just an adjunct faculty that they pay nothing and you teach one class. But something where you were part of the faculty in a limited fashion, and maybe you did a class here and there, and maybe you did some independent studies or tutorials. In other words, something where my experience now in the rest of the political world could be more useful.

DO: I always felt the academic world was valuable because it forces you to think through where you are. It forces you to learn. In order to teach you have to learn. So yes, I think it would be good to have some of that. I miss some of these great experiences I've had. I really did have a good time. I was very lucky to have that kind of environment at twenty-four, to step into that. It was, in some ways, kind of an ideal situation for me, because I was interested in all these education experiments, as well as history and politics. It served me well.

End of Interview