

**Oral History Interview with Dr. Edward McBride**  
**Interview conducted by Angela Baker, June 7, 1993**  
Transcription by Shushan Araya, February 5, 2000

Position: Political Science, Professor and Chair of Department.

Dates associated with Saint Mary's: 1967-1997

Scope and Content: Major topics include: His educational background, the Political Science Department, relationship with current and former students, size of the University, women at Saint Mary's, ethnic background of students.

Transcript:

AB: Okay, let's start with a little bit of background information on you.

EM: Sure.

AB: Could you state your full name?

EM: Edward J. McBride

AB: And your date and place of birth?

EM: March 13, 1934, New Britain, Connecticut, United States.

AB: Okay, can you describe your educational background?

EM: Yes, I took my undergraduate degree with the Jesuits at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York. It's one of three schools Jesuits [ran] in New York State Fordham and Canisius being the other two. And following the Bachelor's of Social Science from Mehoine College I went to the Catholic University of America and there I did my work up to the course level of doctoral work and received an MA in Politics from the Catholic University of America in 1961. Do you want me to go into where I taught before?

AB: Sure and your research interest too.

EM: Okay, yes, okay, and for the first six years of my teaching career I taught at St. Francis College in Loreto, Pennsylvania: that's near Pittsburgh. My research interests in the first part of my career were in American Government. And as I moved here I developed an interest in Canadian Constitutional Law. I had studied that before---Comparative constitutional law---as a graduate student. I'd done some constitutional law teaching at St.

Francis and I made that a major interest here, although I continued to teach most years [not likely] but most years American Government as well. I'm mainly interested in--- as far as writing---in the Canadian judiciary and I have co-authored a book with a former student of mine, Randell Baldum, and Dalhousie Law professor Don Russell entitled Supreme Court of Canada Decision Making. And that has exemplified my main focus of interest, which is in comparative constitutional law but centered upon the Canadian judiciary especially to the extent the Canadian judiciary, now since the advent of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is taking on a role [akin] to that of the Supreme Court of the United States.

AB: When did you first come to Saint Mary's University?

EM: I came to Saint Mary's University in the fall of 1967.

AB: So what was your role when you first came?

EM: Dr. William Dalton was the chairman of the department at the time—he was the founding chairman and our—the first year—of teaching at St. Mary's in Political Science. In those days you only had to teach two courses. He did that so that people settling in would have an advantage. And I taught American Government and I taught an International Relations course. After that I continued to teach American Government and then offered a section of the freshman course in review, plus sharing the plenary sessions and lecturing with Dr. Dalton and a couple of others. And within two or three years though I developed Comparative Constitutional Law as a then new course offered at St. Mary's and since then I have offered it for 25 years. Until the last few years I continued to teach an introduction section at Saint Mary's but given the press on our jurisprudence program within Political Science, I now just teach above the 200 level.

AB: Okay, the size of the university has grown a great deal...

EM: Yes, it has.

AB: ...how has that affected the university?

EM: I know—actually—it is conventional to say the size has risen so much we are no longer the “old Saint Mary's” maybe [inaudible]. I dispute that a little. If I may say so—I mean I should explain in terms of [inaudible]. Every institution has its own best view of itself - that's true of the Supreme Court, it's true in the presidency - all institutions that last over time have what's been called a history and a memory, a collective cumulative memory. And though Saint Mary's is large by comparison to the Saint Mary's I joined and it's even fairly large by Canadian standards now, it's not by any means a small school, our boast,

“where tradition meets the future” is an encapsulation of our own best view of ourselves. As an institution we're an accessible university. That obviously means one thing as regards our size, we have grown because we are accessible. Accessible to a type of student that perhaps doesn't feel as comfortable in another school [inaudible] - those who have disabilities for one. But we are accessible in another sense; according to our own best view of ourselves, it's best symbolized by the open door. For the purposes of this interview, that door is closed but when you came upon my office, the door was open—always is—when I am in and we're accessible in that sense. Saint Mary's now probably could [view] itself as a fairly large university that still manages the sense of scale to keep it accessible for the students to the professors especially now.

Having said all of that, I'd be the first to concede, having studied institutions throughout my career, first the President of the United States and the Supreme Court of Canada, institutions don't always live up to their own best view of themselves but that own best view of itself of an institution is rather a way of holding its collective feet to the fire. And I must tell you that in all changes of scale at Saint Mary's, I've never seen the institution in its own best view of itself abandon this notion of accessibility: abandon this notion that however large we might grow, there still is an ideal, an ideal centered on the student, the student's progress. And that is not lost on certain of our undergraduates, I'd like to certainly think so, maybe in our program. It's certainly not lost on a good many of our alumni. They are quite interested in the progress of their successory students and although they themselves may have gone through here when we were smaller to the extent that you can convey to them that their [successory?] students are receiving that same sort of interest they take pride in at Saint Mary's. I've seen letters from a student —a former—not former student, past student—I always had a saying we don't have former students, we have past students—[you're] not a former student—I received a letter from a past student this spring and I'd sent him some material about the progress of our people in what he went through at Saint Mary's in jurisprudence within political science and then he wrote back and said “this is the sort of thing I most vividly remember when I was at Saint Mary's” and I didn't quote him directly “and this is what puts Saint Mary's head and shoulders above any other university in town”—which is a good thing to say. And so you can concede knowledge of the size but it's really a sign of success not failure. Oh! We've grown.

The other point I'd make in respect to the size, there was a time at Saint Mary's, I put it maybe in the early 70s, when—again speaking about the collective sense within an institution—the self-confidence of the school was lower than it is now. It had to do with we weren't so great then and at the marking out of some sort of distinctive place within the Nova Scotia complex of the universities that had not yet been done and Saint Mary's still small enough then and perhaps to be threatened by the notion of well there is a larger school here that may someday come to absorb us. Such has been our success that it's no

longer a likely possibility for all the talk of reorganization - most often Saint Mary's seems to be rather on the assertive side and Dalhousie on the defensive. Now I am not here to speak about inter-institutional rivalries so much because I have a close connection with the Law School at Dalhousie and have indeed collaborated with other professors on the one book I mentioned before and have another one previous to that so it isn't a matter of rivalry just a question of what place Saint Mary's have that was uncertain in the early 70s, it's not uncertain now. Probably more so than Dalhousie we are the accessible university in the province, our own campaign fund notes our distinctiveness. I don't know...I don't think they use exactly that word in the sense I've used it, we're an accessible university. And if anything the changes in higher education we—Saint Mary's—have been able to master let's say better than some other schools because we've had that tradition we carried forward and I detect and again I may be generalizing from experience within my department, my Faculty of Arts, but I detect a greater self-confidence on that collective entity of Saint Mary's then say in the early 70s.

AB: So do you feel your relationship with your students has changed over the years?

EM: No, I must say that has been not accidental or coincidental. If there's anything I work at the hardest is to maintain that sense with the students and I always take—attach great significance to student commentaries and their evaluation and I cast myself against myself, it's the only one I can compete with is myself. And I am pleased to say none of that has changed. The things they point out most frequently are the same as before. The interest and motivation that you try to impart to them, the concern for their development, that sort of thing and that hasn't changed and I can only go by that sort of response. As I say it can be at some cost. You find you're working maybe harder in really a physical sense – physiological sense working harder to do the same thing that you did before but there is a difference and I certainly would say this between a class of 50 and a class of 70 if it is a mix of lecture and participation. That extra 20 really pleases you to press to get to know them to get them to do enough by way of [inaudible]. It's really like anything else, it's just a challenge.

AB: Okay, let's talk about some changes that took place in the early years when you were here. For instance the introduction of females.

EM: Yes, I would certainly like to speak about that. When I began here at Saint Mary's in the fall of '67 there were practically no girls, no co-eds. My student assistant was, at the time, was a co-ed and she went on to state law and I think that was probably the portent of things to come. I was lecturing to [inaudible] and digression from a lecture today—last year I pointed out to a class in which there were three student girls going on to law school, anyway, that under my own tutelage, I can count out three dozen female students who have

gone on to law school, some are still completing a law degree and the bulk of them are practicing. And this year for example, five in my jurisprudence course co-eds accepted into law school and that's the record – the record of five — nine altogether but five were young ladies and I hold that out to them and that has been a change. Two weeks ago I received a phone call from a young woman—Antoine Miayane and she is now Dr. Miayane. She's completed with Political Science in Northwestern, which is a very nice school in the States and Toni was the one and only Queen Elizabeth Silver Jubilee medalist at Saint Mary's and she went onto Laval and Carleton and then ultimately to Northwestern. So certainly that's a great change and need I say a great change for the better and might say too that it has added and I think cohered well with that tradition of caring and being personally interested.

But I think that where people are breaking new ground and in the early days they were breaking new ground, the need for and a corresponding demand for the interest and the concern and the special advice is greater--and that one can think—thing can flow into another. You're working with male and female students especially who go on to professional school and graduate school but they kind of set a tone that might not have been there otherwise. I find that—if I may say and you might disagree—I find that there is a greater sensitivity to the young ladies, maybe less competitiveness in the worse sense of that term now that can be borne out by some writings [inaudible] Carol Gilligan, *Other Voice* and so forth. And I had experience of four years working with feminist law students and law professors at Dalhousie Charter of Rights course on the early years of the charter. I would never want to see Saint Mary's and especially with political science department become a place of the paper chase sort of ruthless competition and if anything, I think that possible hard edge has been softened by the high incidence of co-eds we've had go on. Probably for a major in Poli Sci, the ones who had gone on were co-ed took a higher percentage of them than men. And I speak of say law school and graduate school in Political Science, our two doctorates in political science to date would be female, the third one probably male. And our LLMs, which is, sort of the law version of that RLLMs, evenly a portion between two young ladies and two young men. And two of the LLMs by the way are married to one another so they work out nicely. But I think that reinforced through saying where you sit others sat and so on that probably resonated greater with the young ladies than even with the men, although they're very appreciative of it. And then the response to that plays back over all the rest so it's been there probably—I think that's been a much more important development than the addition of size—additional size. One is quantitative: the size. One is qualitative: we're a better school for it, the program is better for it and [unclear] of professions is better for it.

AB: Are there any other differences you have noticed in the student populations over the years?

EM: Oh, yes, the one that probably distresses me most but not much you can do about it. Well to backtrack, when I taught at Saint Francis in Pennsylvania, it was mainly a residential college but it's a university program but they call it college. There's very little graduate work but it was like Saint Mary's in all other respects in the programs. But it was unheard of virtually for students to work. If they had a job, a token sort of campus job and if there has been one negative development, I would single it out—it has nothing to do with Saint Mary's, it has nothing to do with the students—in the sense of they haven't willed this. It's the sheer economic necessity for them to work. Surely you must know this, that it's not unheard of for a student to work two jobs when of course the job at hand really is the school work. Now as a practical matter, you have classes and course work and then you have a part time job or virtually a full-time job in which you are rather dispensable in the present market and comes an emergency request to work extra and there's a test or a paper due or a report, what gives way? It's going to have to be the academic I am afraid. And then that is when the other part of Saint Mary's does come in and you need to take that into account and at least they can feel like they can go to some “profs” —I hope for certain that's most of us—well you can come and say “ok what can I do?” but then they can't—some of them—really give up the job. And if they don't do what's required of them on the spot, they'll lose the job and ergo the academic side as well. If we had the magic wand to change one thing, I wouldn't change the size, I wouldn't change the movement in Nova Scotia for reorganization, I wouldn't change any of that necessarily, but I would change the need for students to work. I don't mean just the usual little check-in at the library type job. I mean the off-campus job where you are on call and if you can't meet every obligation to work then you might lose the job.

AB: Okay, have you noticed any differences in the ethnic origins of your students?

EM: To some extent. Oh, yes. Yes I do, I want to speak about one point especially and it relates to the work I spoke of. It was in my field in a sense. The law school commendably came to the realization that minority practitioners in the law in Nova Scotia were very few. I am pleased to say that one of the established black lawyers in Nova Scotia, Paul Walter, is a former student of mine, majored with honors but he was not what they called indigenous black in the [inaudible] satisfactory term. It just means native of Nova Scotia. He was a West Indian but Paul practices law in the Valley with two or three others of my former students so I am no stranger to that. Kendrick Byron who was also from St. Kitts in the West Indies, he took a Master's degree in International Relations at Carleton and took a law degree in Atwood Hall but they were forerunners and precursors and that was before the law school made the effort to recruit minority students. As I say, Paul went to “Dal” and Kendrick went to Atwood Hall, but now they have what they call the IBM program (Indigenous Black and Mi'kmaq) at the law school and one of my former students—if I shall say past student [inaudible] past student just got through there as one of the first

IBMs but this year is the vintage year. I have three Mi'kmaq students in my classes this year and all three of them have been accepted to law school. Each, of course, like all students are individuals and I spent time with each one but each one was different—and by the way two girls and one boy—I would like to see of course more of that. The opportunity is there at the law school and elsewhere. Ottawa has an IBM type program too and we've had [acceptances?] among those three at both Dal and Ottawa. And now here's how this can work though Angela, a past student who went through here sweeping off a double major in "Poli Sci" and English, Peter Shea, Peter Shea was a [inaudible] and he's completed his first year at Dal Law. He was a Rhodes finalist from Newfoundland of Irish origin –Irish Canadian origin—and one of the IBM students got into law school and Peter said to him-when he was working with him—at the time he said to him “you're gonna wind up there, you're gonna wind up there” and he did. That's a nice thing a really nice thing but I'd like to see more of that and I think in due course it will. The student Peter inspired that came into my course but he already had that idea planted and that motivation and I most certainly think that it will ripple back to others.

AB: So in the early years when you were here, did you notice much of an ethnic diversity?

EM: Very little, with the exception again of Paul Walter and Kendrick Byron who were Caribbean blacks but the rest of course was very little. The names and the classes would of course suggest mainly Nova Scotia's roots itself. Scottish Canadian names, etc., but it's probably well—let me backtrack a little bit too though again I must speak of those who weren't native to Canada. Lee Thomas was a great basketball player for Saint Mary's in the 70s championship years and he came out of those horrible ghettos in the United States and he was a fine gentleman. He'd do very well academically but worked hard. But another story that I am quite proud of is a “fella” named Cliff Shawclay and Clifford was a black fellow from again another one of those American ghettos like Newark, New Jersey where indeed to have a member of the family killed was nothing. His own father was murdered and he came here recruited classically, recruited to play basketball and he dropped basketball and again to Saint Mary's credit we didn't drop him and he took an MPA eventually at Dal and has a high administrative post in the New York Transit system. So there were students before but they tended to be either Caribbean blacks or American basketball players. The CIAU regulations changed a little but at the recruiting and it was nothing in the 1970s to have 3 of 5 starters recruited from the States. Rules preclude that now. But there certainly seems to be no lack of good black athletes at Saint Mary's but they'll now tend to be not so much American but from here so I guess I could speak for most of—kind of—precursors and forerunners, very good people as individuals as well as students, Cliff Shawclay and Kendrick. Kendrick was one of the stars and leaders at my seminars and Paul Walter. What I would like to see now would be instead of

one...three...four ...more within the relatively small program and last year was the year for the kids who were Mic Mac.

AB: Have you noticed any changes in the ages of your students?

EM: Not too much actually because for some reason in my courses we never lack for seasoned individuals. The gentleman who just got his degree last year at such an advanced age, 85, Samuel Prouse-Merdock, was a student of mine and he was in that seminar with Kendrick Byron, Lynn Connors and Carol Findan and all of them and they really enjoyed taking classes with him. He added a lot to it because they wouldn't know from my classes figures out of American Law and Politics like Felix Frankfurter and James Farlen. He would have met them because he was a business executive in the States for many years although a native of Prince Edward Island. So Samuel Prouse-Merdock was to have the leaven and the dough earlier. And then in another development, in late 60s and early 70s, I did [inaudible] a very generous policy, then as a part of the Canadian Military of Veteran Officers would go to class and I had a number of them and they were first rate. They knew exactly what they wanted to do and they did it. And they were high ranking men and some of them wanted command of the Bonaventure, others were pilots—carrier pilots—when they still had the carrier, another retired as rear-admiral and it was a good mix. I had people like that. And I had in my Constitutional Law once—he is now a lawyer—he was a serving Halifax policeman at the time and one day fortuitously doing rights of American Constitutional Law, he happened to come to class with, in his uniform. He said he had a break that day and so—quantitatively as I put it in saying, I added so many, it's just about the same number of individuals—there's a Canadian Forces Commander in my classes this year and coming into classes for me in the fall and he'd be of the same stripe as those other men.

AB: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the faculty and the actual changes that you've seen over the years. How has the faculty that you've worked with changed?

EM: Well there is a couple of obvious points as with the student body. The once all male Poli Sci Faculty has become 5 and 3 male and female. I have the highest regards for the female faculty members. Dr. Naulls who is tragically very ill now and didn't get to teach here too much, but Professor Keeble and Dr. Arsenault are outstanding and I think that's excellent. It can be invaluable in every respect but certainly I think that it's the co-eds that you wish to motivate. I hold out so many others who have gone before them who've done so well but then that's an abstraction to them. I make it as concrete as I can then they go on to the next class and have a highly accomplished professor with an Oxford degree or something like that and very interested in them too, they fit outstandingly into that mold of being interested with them—if you want it to be put that way—and I know but I don't want to go



into detail but where students needed help gave help so that's principle change and pre-relative one. And now, I don't know how to put this, I say the faculty is getting younger in the department which is another way of saying I am getting old. But there was a long stretch there in Poli Sci where it was settled faculty they were just there—veterans—at one point. At one point most of us were closing in on 20 years or 15 years and then owing to death retirements and [inaudible]. I must tell you as far as faculty and I must say this is my experience in Poli Sci and it's certainly true at Saint Mary's in general, the younger the faculty have a very exciting regimen to get ahead in the profession now. It is not any longer possible perhaps to concentrate as much on the day to day teaching as before because of demand of research and demand of professional activity. I happen to think the people in the department want to do an outstanding job of balancing those many things and I don't mean just the female members either, obviously Dr. Naulls too. You see in addition to, all of which have enormous responsibilities, the aforementioned Toni Miayane put it very well. She is teaching in Ottawa and her husband is teaching political science in the University of Montreal—and you imagine the commute back and forth—and she'd tell me she did very well on the course evaluations on Ottawa but she had a good phrase, well it's an analogy, she goes “the hoop is getting smaller”. They play with smaller hoops, our younger faculty. And I say as a challenge to Saint Mary's University in addition to growth and all of that and maintain our own best view of ourselves, we need to take care of our younger faculty, give them the chance to do everything that's required of them professionally maybe—whatever could be done—at the very least veteran professors can be there for advice and shoulder as much of the load as much you possibly can so it doesn't all fall on younger shoulders. That can't help but be a positive element on younger faculty. As I say, it is the same thing I used to say about the students, they get younger every year and personally I just get older. The Political Science Department faculty, half of it is relatively young, it's good.

AB: Are there any other changes over time you have noticed? Or events?

EM: Well, I guess it's certainly co-relative to growth, the physical aspect has deteriorated now. It's no indictment, it's just human nature of things. If a classroom for example has every available seat taken up, that detracts a little from the physical settings. That means books and paraphernalia are piled in the aisles and I like to move around among them in the early going to get their name down and that sort of thing—a face to a name—it tends to interrupt the course. Some of the other classrooms have just plain deteriorated but the opening of the east wing has been helpful—I taught there last year and that was a first rate classroom but it was jumbled with a lot of students and it held the students I had in there comfortably but that was just it. Everybody was there so we could use more space, we could use more space. We could probably use more offices space. Our arrangement in Poli Sci isn't the greatest. Some offices are removed from others but there is this bank right down here and

for the younger perhaps I think it's nice that they could encounter something. Sometimes they could encounter something and want to just take it up with the older crowd, "have you ever had this before with this type of student" that type of thing. It's nice to just pop right into the office. Ideally you'd have all departments with a bank of offices. Also super ideally you'd have the classrooms rather set by the department. As long as I've been in the profession and I'll be doing it again this fall, when classrooms are assigned to me and they're unfamiliar, before the first day of classes I go and check them out and if you feel on the first day of classes the classroom you have checked out is not suitable because there are too many in it, then you know well here is a change. So if we could build another new wing then we'd be much better off and you'd be justified in doing it. The way we run the school we don't cost the province as much money as other operations.

AB: That's about all I wanted to cover, unless there is something you'd like to add?

EM: No, maybe just as a [wrap] to it all most of my real Arts career, I realized the positive take of things - the negatives really are best seen as challenges. I would add one thought because I've been reflecting upon this to a considerable degree, Saint Mary's really isn't engulfed by its numbers. In a sense, we do have that tradition and that own best view of ourselves as an institution that maybe equips us better than any other that I can think of to handle that situation. Now there's a new development and its probably this: that one degree—if you please—is no longer enough and now you have to handle that one. And I am very cognizant of the fact and I will push students on for another degree be it law or academic degree in Political Science. What happens if we had to push twice as many, Doc. Naulls and I probably between the two of us wrote 170 letters of recommendations this year which is a considerable amount and I relish that but I take a great deal of time on each letter, each form. And we set a record of putting people in law school this year: 9, the old record was 7. I was very pleased to be able to do that—the hoop is gets smaller there too—because there were three times as many applications the year we set the record. But that's not enough anymore in a sense that we need to send as many people as possible to not necessarily graduate school but to some sort of post graduate. One for example, one of our former students, Marie Googoo, was also a Mic Mac woman and she took a course last year and she went on to journalism at Ryerson and I was very pleased. Just this spring, the last few weeks [inaudible] continuously at the Mail-Star a—local newspaper—and I say one of the things political scientists do is develop students for graduate work in fields other than political science and law, journalism being one of them. That's how I kind of finish my [interview] by saying I may be in the minority in this field but I think Saint Mary's is well equipped to master the challenges of change in size but there's a change that's not just quantitative but qualitative. And what if as we approach the 21st century, one degree isn't enough? We are gonna adjust to that too. So how is that? Good enough?

AB: That's great.