

Oral History Interview with Victor Catano
Conducted by Daniel Gervais on March 13, 2013
Transcribed by Alison Froese-Stoddard

DG: This is Daniel Gervais. The date is March 13, 2013. It is a Wednesday. Can I ask, what is your full name?

VC: Vic Catano. Victor Catano.

DG: And what is your date and place of birth?

VC: November 20, 1944, born in Pennsylvania, USA.

DG: Can you tell me a little more about your background, where you grew up, if you moved around a lot.

VC: Well, I grew up in Pennsylvania, the north-eastern part. A place called Hazelton, which is coal country. I went to school in Philadelphia.

DG: OK. Could you tell me about your educational background, the institutions you've attended, or research interests?

VC: I did a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering at Drexel University, and then went to Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA, and did a Masters and Ph.D. in psychology.

DG: Ok, and maybe a little about your academic interests? At that time, or now?

VC: Oh, at that time, it was in Psychology with an interest in experimental applied Psychology and then primarily in industrial organizational, which I have specialized in since I've been at Saint Mary's.

DG: Right. And what is your current position at Saint Mary's?

VC: I am a full professor, and Chair of the Department of Psychology.

DG: Ok. How did you originally arrive at your position at Saint Mary's? And approximately when?

VC: I've been here since 1972, I started in September 1972. How did I get here? I was looking for a job, my wife was pregnant, we wanted to live in the northeastern part of the States, the Eastern part of Canada, and I did a job search. I had a number of responses, a number of job interviews, and at that time, Canada seemed very interesting, and the job offer was very good compared to the other offers I had, in terms the working environment, the hours I had to teach, the salary. It was competitive.

DG: And what were your initial impressions when you arrived on campus for the first time?

VC: Well, it was very, very different. You had McNally, you had the, I guess, the Burke building, which was the old library at that time. The Rice Residence, and they were in the process of finishing Loyola when I came for my job interview. It was just about to be opened during that period, or it was open or just about to be opened – it was relatively new. And you had the athletic field. That was it. So it was a small campus, it was in an urban environment, which was where we wanted to be, in Halifax where our first impressions were very favourable, very positive. So with all things considered, it seemed like a good place to work and a good place to raise a family.

DG: That's excellent to hear. Can you tell me a little bit about your department, when you first arrived, compared with where it is now? I know that you were essentially the driving force in establishing the Masters and Doctoral programs in Industrial Organizational Psychology.

VC: When I came in '72, there would have been about maybe 7 people there at that time. The department was expanding – it had just, they created in '66, '67, somewhere around there. The first Chairperson was Dr. Jerry Gordon who had a run-in with administration and he eventually left, and he became the founder of Atlantic Child Guidance Centre which has now been absorbed into the IWK. And Jerry passed away, and he was very influential in Nova Scotia psychological circles, and there's an undergraduate award named in his honour which is administered by the Association of Psychologists in Nova Scotia, which is given out annually to the top ranking undergraduate person. But he had gone, and a lot of young people had come, and they had left for a variety of reasons, and when I came, there were three of us who were hired at the same time, and we all arrived at the same time: myself, Bob Konopasky, and the person who later became Chair, but left to pursue a career in Medicine, Karl Konrad. And so we were three new people, and there was... who was there at the time... There was Irmgard Lenzer, Jim Darley, and um... I'm trying to think of who else was there. I can't remember, but there was one or two others, and they had just had a situation where there was a member there who had not been given tenure. He was still there when I was interviewed. There weren't that many people in the department at that time. It was beginning to grow, so there may have only been Jim and Irmgard there. Now I'm trying to think if there was one more, who it was, but uh...it doesn't jump out at me. So it would have been us five, or maybe one more, and we went from there.

DG: How many students would you have been dealing with at that time?

VC: I think the University as a whole... enrollment was around 23, 2400? Mostly full-time, some part-timers as well, but mostly full-time. It was maybe a quarter of the size where it is today, a quarter to a third of the size. In terms of our classes, we would probably have much less than we have today, but fortunately Psychology did have some... large classes, but not the sort of we have today. Our introductory class got students from across the

University and then there were a small number of honours students, considerably smaller, but proportionately, probably the same proportion there is today with respect to the University, but given that, you only had 2400 across all the University. The students in psychology would have been much much more mature than now.

DG: Um, what was the internal drive like to create the Masters and Doctoral programs in Industrial Organizational Psychology? Was that something that when you arrived, they were talking about doing, or was it something that you brought in as an initiative?

VC: No. We brought it in as an initiative. One of the hires we made in that direction was in the '70s. We had made a couple of hires, and more staff had been given to Psychology, and right following the hiring, myself, Bob and Karl Konrad, I think it was about two years later, we hired Phil Street, and he's still here. And about the same time Ken Hill who is just about to retire. And then the next hire was, he was an eminent applied social psychologist very interested in higher technology, John Chadwick-Jones. He came in from England in what would have been the late '70s.

And we worked with him to develop the Masters program, and at that time, back at the late '70s, early '80s, there was always concern about how we can establish ourselves as something unique in Halifax where you had Dalhousie, and The Mount. And we couldn't compete with Dalhousie in terms of resources. They were very well established in terms of animal research, cognitive research, experimental psychology. The Mount was developing a niche in terms of life span development, and we looked at the resources that we had, and we thought that we probably had the expertise to develop a Masters program. There was some encouragement from the University, because there was a Masters in Astronomy, which was just developed, and the Science faculty was supportive, although the Dean at that time I don't think was a particular friend of psychology, Bill Bridgeo. But we went ahead nonetheless, and we issued the proposal. Initially we thought that the title would be Masters of Science and Applied Psychology. We had two streams at that time, we had Masters in Adult Psychology, and we had one in Clinical Psychology. And we did comply with all the requirements of MBHEC who sent for someone to view the program, and got a psychologist from McGill, George Ferguson, who did a report on it that said there was a need for both programs, and we had confidence to put on both.

And I think our first intake was in 1980 for Masters students, we took clinical students for a year before we took IO students. And the political program stayed in place – there was always a need in the community for clinical psychologists to get people to move here. And there was always concern, and it's still a dilemma, nationally in Canada, as to what the appropriate requirements are for clinical psychologists. And in the '80s, and even into the '90s, the standard was a Masters, and some experience was adequate. That changed, we're now looking at the Psychological Association, and the different provincial organizations that you must now have a Ph.D. to practice independently as a

psychologist. And so they raised the bar a number of years ago, but there are still some provinces and territories where a Masters is an appropriate credential.

But back in the late '80s, Dalhousie, their Psych department was always experimental. They had an aversion to offering clinical psychology courses and there was always tension between Dalhousie Psych Department and the professional community about offering that program. But eventually, there was a need for a clinical program and there were some changes at Dalhousie and they put on a program which received approval, but there were a lot of conditions placed on it, about community involvement, and evolving with the universities, which would be Saint Mary's and The Mount, in terms of supervising, teaching courses and so on. And once that program came into place, and with the changing requirements for clinical training, plus the fact that in the early to mid '90s we had people who were primarily responsible for clinical training, and establishing the clinical program had moved away. Two of them moved to Australia, to take up other positions.

We had a choice to make. Did you keep trying to run both programs - each were under-resourced - or do we cease the clinical program because we didn't have any resources at that point. Do we go look for them? We had resources in IO, should we move in that direction? It was a bit contentious, as you might expect, but at the end of the day, the decision was made to terminate the clinical stream and continue with IO. And with that decision made, in terms of the hires we made in the early to mid-'90s, people were attracted to the fact that there was a graduate program, there was more expertise involved with IO that people were hired, and so we soon had a critical mass by the late '90s where there was a natural push in the university at that time (that) had decided that graduate education was an important objective for the university to pursue. The university was encouraging different departments to look at developing graduate programs and we felt this was a natural extension of what we first proposed to the MBHEC and we received broad support from the community, from other universities, and the MBHEC approved it.

DG: Ok.

VC: So we've had it since 2003, I think. Thereabouts.

DG: 2003, ok. And what is the graduate experience in IO, Industrial Organizational Psychology at Saint Mary's, right now in the present?

VC: Well, we have about... hard to count because we have some part-time students, but we have about... oh, between Masters and PhD, I would say about 30 students, in various stages of completion. We have, to date... PhDs take a bit longer to produce, and I think we've produced... we've graduated five, with another one, two, three... about to graduate this following summer when they complete their work. So we're now in a position where we're graduating one to two PhDs a year, or will be in that position. At the Masters level,

we take in about six students a year; it's a small program. The reason it's both that and the PhD are small, is that we don't take students unless we can provide support to them for a period of time. We fully support Masters level students for two years, we support PhD students for three years. You need to have a Masters in order to get admission into the PhD program. Generally, in PhD programs, students first enter for a Masters program and then they continue, but there's a selection of students who opt not to continue. Our Masters is a two year program, it's designed for people to work, or to go on to the PhD program. And there's another selection process – they're not just automatically admitted to PhD after they finish their Masters, and some go on to PhD and there's another selection process that they have to go through. So if someone starts here in their Masters, it should take them five years to finish their PhD. And we would fully support them for that five year period.

We don't have a lot of resources, the University supplies some fellowships, but a lot of our students who are very competitive receive grant funding from external agencies. We've been very lucky in that regard. Plus with respect to both the Masters and the PhD program, one of the sources for students also which makes life very nice, is that we are one of the programs that is endorsed by the Canadian Forces, with their personal selection unit, after people are involved with industrial organisational psychology, they do (inaudible) training, etc.

And generally if somebody is in one of those positions after a number of years, they can apply for post-graduate training. And the Canadian Forces will subsidize them, they're kept on full salary, the Forces picks up their tuition, all their moving costs, all their book costs, everything. So we get – because of the number of other psychologists we have on staff with our relationship with the CF - there's us, and there's Calgary out west. But we are the preferred programs for the CF in terms of where they... they can't... if they select someone for PG, they can't say you must go to this school, but they strongly suggest it. There's some reasons, for example if the person has a family, and there's an applied program at Carleton, they're allowed to go. But there is a log of suggestion that you consider going to Saint Mary's or you're going to Calgary. So we're on that list. So we get one to two Masters students a year who will come here for two years. We have two currently in place now. Finishing their first year. And we will have generally a number of PhD students they authorize for PG duty, you go off to work for two, three, four years, and they let you go for PhD. So we have our last two PhD graduates were from the Canadian Forces, and just accepted one, he's coming here in September, another PhD start from CF. So that's fully subsidized so you don't have to worry about funding while they're here for two years.

DG: Yeah, and they can focus on their studies as opposed to how they're going to pay their bills and stuff. That sounds fantastic. Ok, in October, 2007, there was a Canadian

Association of University Teachers online bulletin . You're quoted as a researcher involved in a study looking into the stress among academics, is that right?

VC: Yeah.

DG: How do you view Saint Mary's efforts to deal with, alleviate stress for faculty? Maybe when you first arrived compared to now? Has there been some significant change there?

VC: Well, when I first arrived, I don't think there was any thought of academics being stressful, or concern about it all. Now there are programs that the university offers, and again, partly because several of our departmental members are involved with establishing healthy workplaces, healthy workplace programs through the CN centre. Now the University always has, you know, they are more concerned about it. Not directly involved with individuals for us, but making work life better for individuals. There's also more concern about the stress that students suffer, and more efforts at informing faculty of what the stress is like on the part of students. And so there's more opportunities. There's nothing that is being forced down faculties throats, but we hope that there are things there that can build on. For example on the students' part, before I came, there were no students services to speak of in terms of counselling. Maybe there was a part-time counsellor, maybe academic advising, now you have a counselling centre that is equipped to deal with things.

DG: Yeah, individualized counsellors.

VC: But for us, stress is particularly now, with younger faculty, it's something that is always there, because you have... You see this mostly with younger women faculty, not to say that it doesn't happen to men, but you have young women in a dual role of raising families, during their thirties, universities are changing but there's still not enough women on place, so if you need women on committees, or calling women to do things so that there's female representation on different bodies, and so all that service work is in conjunction with teaching courses, trying to do their research so they'll get tenure, or to get grants. There's much more pressure now, and demands on younger faculty in terms of being productive in research are much greater than it was in the past, in terms of what they have to do to secure tenure, to secure promotion. So that produces a great deal of stress for younger faculty.

DG: Getting pulled in many directions at one time.

VC: Yeah, particularly for female faculty. There's probably more stressors at home, depending on their relationships with their partners, you still have to carry a lot of responsibilities outside the university, and that adds to their work stress.

DG: Currently your research involves the impact of psychological environments on health, safety, and productivity of workers?

VC: Yeah. Among other things. I'm pretty eclectic, you know.

DG: Yeah! What do you see, may I ask, as the impacts of the psychological environment at Saint Mary's at the student and faculty level?

VC: I think there's a very good relationship. I mean, we're still – I don't think you can call us a small university any more, not in the way that I think of a small university. We're probably a medium sized place – we have about 8000 students. All told, there's still an opportunity to get to know people and to get to know other faculty members. It's not like Dalhousie, has 17,000 students, and twice the number of faculty or more faculty, and you don't know everybody. It's getting, as we've grown, I would know every faculty member by name and face. We've had a great deal of turnover in the last ten years, where about third of the faculty has changed with new hires, replacing retirees... So you get to know some of them, but not as well as I did in the past, you know? I knew everybody in every department – now I know the old fogies like myself, not so much the other people, unless they happen to be in my department or people I have to work with for one reason or another.

So in that sense, it's changing, but I think there are some things about Saint Mary's which are unique. I was President of the Association of Canadian University Teachers for several years and I was on the executive for 13 years in various capacities. I had the opportunity to travel around the country and see other universities, and for whatever reason, we seemed to have had fewer problems than most other places. There seems to be, nowadays, much more respect between faculty and administration than there are in other places. In a lot of other places, the administration is just seen as the "enemy not to be trusted", but I don't see that here. I mean, there are some people here who have that idea in their head, but most faculty don't. I think most faculty see the administration as having a role to play, and on the other hand, there's also, I think, most people are satisfied that there is a faculty union in place to provide a check on things, and to keep the administration from doing things that aren't appropriate. So I think there's a good working relationship. I think that one thing that both faculty union and administration strive for is to maintain a good sense of labour relations, both through contract negotiations, and also in administrative property. They try to make things work – not that we agree on everything, but I think there's a good working relationship between the parties. And most time when there are differences, we do our best to try and resolve those amicably.

DG: That's encouraging to hear. Especially from a student perspective, you know? So what are some of the projects, or directions you see your department taking in the future, going forward? Where would you like to take it?

VC: Well, my days here are coming to an end. This is my last year as Chair, so it will be up to the new people where they want to go with the department. I think in terms of aspirations, one of the areas that have grown tremendously is the interest in occupational health and safety. The CN Centre is, I think, doing great things. They've just gotten more funding from CN. I think they're getting more, perhaps, interest in getting a stand-alone Masters of Occupational Health, which may be bit different from IO. That's one thing. The other area where I see some people wanted to move is a small cluster of people in Forensic Psychology, and Psych of Law are looking to see if they can move that into the direction of a Masters degree of some kind.

And another thing which is happening is... Again, our department, if you're familiar with psychology, in terms of our orientation, the preponderance of our classes are based on the social science side of psychology. But we do offer programs and courses in the natural sciences side. And we have a couple of faculty members whose main area of research is on the natural sciences, such as Psychophysics, or Neuropsychology, things like that. And some of our faculty – the Science faculty has a Master of Applied Science, and they're involved in that, so there's a growing interest in some of our faculty members who are not in the IO area, and taking those students and part of that Master of Applied Science, where they can work with other students if they can focus on neuropsychology or in some cases, forensic psychology, from the Forensic Sciences program. So that's where people are going – in those directions. I don't think we'll ever re-establish our clinical program – we don't have the resources to do that with Dalhousie offering the PhD, there's no need for it, or evidence for that.

We've just about reached the limits of our growth, given the University's stays the same. We could always use more faculty because we're the largest – I'd argue that we're the largest department in the University, where courses aren't required. For example, we have a large enrollment in management and leadership. Everybody in the university in the Commerce program has to take one of their courses – but nobody has to take a psychology course. Our enrollments are quite high, and our student to faculty ratio is 60:1, when the university average is under 20:1. And even if you discount large undergrad courses in the first year, you still only get down to 40:1, and our upper level courses are quite heavy. And so we could always use more assistants in that regard. But in terms of new programs, and new directions, we have the PhD in IO, perhaps those Masters programs I talked about, or the Master of Applied Science in Neuropsych. We've asked for more faculty, but given the state of the budgets, I doubt we'll get it this year. We have one person retiring at the end of August, Ken Hill, and one of the issues of what we do in terms of replacing him, is what area do we replace him? Ken came as sort of a

cognitive child psychologist, and moved steadily over his career into different aspects of cognitive, and he's an expert in child wayfinding, in terms of finding kids in search and rescue. And the issue is, how do we replace him, what areas do we search for, and that may help about the direction of our exposure. I'm just initiating discussions on that matter at department meetings.

DG: Ok. I guess then, finally, I'd like to ask, having come to this small campus, and changed the face of it, adding prestige, what is your impression now of Saint Mary's today? How is the University doing? Is it living, breathing, fluid organism?

VC: I think it's a great place. It's moved in a number of areas in the right direction. It still has maintained its emphasis on undergraduate education, but it's also recognized that if you put your resources into graduate education, provide more support for faculty, encouragement from the faculty involved in research. But now in terms of if you don't get external markers of success, like just how much research are you getting done through external agencies, we've increased that tremendously. There is still a lot of work to be done in terms of expansion of the campus which is different from when I came here, and it's still going to be growing... over the horizon. We're out of classroom space, I mean I just spent the last couple of days working with our faculty members to try to get them to move classes around because there's no classrooms. So there's that problem we have to confront. But you know, the whole change is dramatic, you walk here through the library and the Atrium and people working and that – it's a totally different environment, one which I think is more supportive of students and student who work here. It's very nice. You know, I had the opportunity to go elsewhere in my career, and I turn around and say, "Nah, gonna stay here."

DG: Excellent. Well, Dr. Catano, on behalf of the Patrick Power Library Archives, I thank you very much for your oral history.

VC: Ok.