Oral History Number: 408-004
Interviewee: Erling Oelz
Interviewer: David Brooks
Date of Interview: September 8, 2006
Project: University of Montana Oral History Project

David Brooks: All right, it is September 8, 2006, and I am David Brooks, the interviewer for the University of Montana's Oral History Project. Today I am interviewing Erling Oelz here in the Mansfield Library. Mr. Oelz, I was hoping you could start out by talking a little bit just about your personal and educational background, and what brought you to Missoula and the University of Montana.

Erling Oelz: Ok. Well I was born in southwestern Michigan along the shores of Lake Michigan. I am one of seven children and went to school in Michigan and then went to school in Illinois. My first professional job was in a military school in central Missouri. I was a librarian there without formal library training and because of that, the institution that I was working at, which is no longer in operation now, was interested in providing me opportunities to work on a library degree. That allowed me to go to summer school at the University of Illinois in Champagne.

After three years at the military school I decided it was a good time to leave that and concentrate on my master's degree. I applied to Illinois for an assistantship and then went to school there full time, had a three-quarter-time assistantship, and ended up graduating after my second year. Then continued working at the university as a professional librarian on the Illinois staff for three years.

One day in my last position at Illinois [where I] was in charge of circulation—which at that point was the main library, plus all the book stacks which were housed on 10 floors and encompassed something in the neighborhood of excess of 3.5 million volumes. We were in the midst of moving into a book stacks addition so I had a big project underway. It was a time in education, this was back in the late '60s, I think library jobs, jobs in higher education were much more plentiful at that point. I was just sort of reviewing some classifieds in a professional journal and I ran across one in Montana.

The family had taken vacations to the West to some extent. We had been to Montana once before and I had a brother who was working in Colorado, so I was somewhat intrigued by the announcement. I called to see if it was still vacant and it was. I applied and ends up that I took a position here. That was back in mid-1971. I have been here all that time and have seen, in what I would consider in my professional career, a great deal of change, specifically as it relates to the library, but certainly as it relates to the university as well.

I was hired as the director of public services and one of my first jobs was to coordinate the move of the library from the old, which is now the Social Science Building, to this building in around 1975-76. The building program for the library had already been developed.

Construction had begun, but I worked closely with the architects and the contractors, then also devised a plan to integrate this collection, or move the collection from the old library to this building. That was fun because it was done during Christmas break. The old library didn't have satisfactory elevators, so we contracted with a local moving firm and they raised the trailer to the floors of the annex of the old library. We moved everything in boxes, onto pallets, and then it was moved over here.

One thing that we did that sort of complicated the move: The journal collection in the old library used to all be on one floor and everything was arranged alphabetically. When we moved to this building, all the journals were integrated with the book collection. So when we moved and placed new materials, newly relocated materials, here on the shelf we had to integrate the journal collection at the same time. That was like fitting lots of pieces of the puzzle together at once. It worked well. We had a student crew, we had our own staff and we did it in something around three weeks. At that point I don't know what the size of the collection was. Now it is like 1.5 million. We weren't over a million at that point, but it was still a good-size collection to move considering that everything had to be boxed.

That was my first responsibility and one has to step back in terms of thinking about libraries in the '70s. Although other larger universities had online systems in place, the University of Montana did not. Again, back in the '70s recall that one would be using a card catalogue with three-by-five cards. Instead of using online databases to discover what index or what journals had been written on a particular subject you were using basically print indices to find all of that. The searching process wasn't—it might be direct, but certainly not as precise as what we have today.

I've seen the transformation from a card catalogue to what we did with an online system; we are now in the second iteration of an online system. Now we are at a point where we have a large number of our journals that are available electronically online and we have remote access. Before, where one was required if they were going to do library research, it had to be done in the physical facility itself, which is no longer the case.

Now we are at a point where the information is so plentiful, that I think there is a whole new set of challenges for all users and for librarians in dealing with this information and how do we identify what is the most appropriate information to use? Is it coming to us from an authoritative source? Since we sort of investigate everything from the standpoint—well it is on the Internet—it is sometimes difficult for a user to cipher whether this is information that is provided by the University of Montana Mansfield Library, or if it is just information somewhere out in space and it happens to be on the Internet and it looks good, so I am going to use it. That is in a nutshell, moving from a very straight forward structured environment to one now where the boundaries are almost unlimited in terms of finding information.

DB: I've got a couple of questions that you raised. The first is going back to your first job in the library at the military school you were in, you mention that you didn't have a library degree at

the time and began working on it then. It seems like library studies have been ramped up since then, there is more of a requirement to have a degree in library studies of some sort before you would get a job, is that the case?

EO: Oh, most definitely.

DB: When did that happen? Also, what are the library studies like on this campus?

EO: I guess I will answer your last question. There is a library program on this campus. Basically, it piggy backs along with a School of Education degree. One could get a job at a grade school, or maybe a public library position in rural Montana. If I was interested in pursuing a professional position in another academic library I would have to go to an accredited library school. I can't tell you the number that there are now, but it's maybe something under 50. They are accredited and you have appropriate programs that cover bibliography, cover technology, cover instruction, cover history, and cover history of books.

What I did at that point— it was a small library, the military library was a very small library. At that point Missouri was somewhat comparable to Montana. I had a couple of courses as an undergrad. I also worked in the library when I went to school, so I think they hired me because they probably didn't have to pay a great deal and they saw the potential maybe of sending me back so I could work on a library program.

When I started going to library school, some of the same courses are being taught now: government documents, as I mentioned, some reference resources for the social sciences, for the sciences, for the humanities, so that you get a background of major universal bibliographic resources in reference that date back from when some of these resources were first printed. You are dealing with bibliographies from national libraries throughout the world, so you have an idea of the kinds of information that is there and a little bit about what that book—the information contained in that book.

You had cataloguing classes and you had—oh, what other courses? I am trying to think— children's literature. The curriculum for instruction in library schools has changed dramatically. I had a class in so-called automation that basically was trying to instruct the students on the makeup of the computer. I think again this is basically back at that point in the '60s when computers—in fact at Illinois they were still using punch cards. Punch cards were the first entry into the [area of] automation. We were sort of learning the ins and outs behind a computer and I wasn't totally in with that, I wasn't particularly enthralled with that.

Automation has become big from the standpoint, not so much knowing programs, but just applications that the computer offers that are definitely a feature where one wants to take advantage of them because you need to know as much as you can about the applications. The revisions to library school curriculums have been very widespread. Some of the same programs exist; you still need the basic bibliography, but then you also now need instructional skills so

that you can work with the professor and integrate all of the information resources potentially into some of the direction that the professor is trying to provide in the classroom.

It boils down to a bit about trying to have the resources that pertain to a particular discipline a little bit more clearly understood than just trying to have a whole gamut of information resources from A to Z. It is too much, it is not necessary. Why focus students in a particular discipline on resources that they don't really have an immediate need for because their focus right now is, say in history, or chemistry, or it is in psychology, it is not in something that is more broad-based. You try to work in smaller increments and provide information that relates to the study at hand.

DB: I want to get back to talking about resources that this library has in just a minute, but aside from mentioning your early lack of enthusiasm for automation and computers, obviously in your time here, this library has gone online. When did that happen, when was the first online card catalogue?

EO: We are probably talking—well, the online system came up in the '80s. I can't give you anything more specific than that right now and it might be the late '80s. We tried—well, the first system we had was not, I am not really very skilled in computerese, but it was not the same kind of a system that we presently have. Today, you can put in many kinds of combinations of words, you enter the data. In the first system that we had, yes, you entered in the data, but it was not as robust a system as it is now.

DB: So you didn't have the option of whether these were keywords, or subject, or—?

EO: You could do that, but it was much more structured and it didn't allow as much freedom and free text-type searching as you can do now. But again I think these were library systems, these were developed specifically for library applications. Just as the Mansfield Library has had a growth over a period of years, so has automation and the products that libraries have had in terms of automated online systems.

The first system we had was certainly not as sophisticated as the systems that are available for purchase now days. You have systems now that you can tie in like we have today; we can tie in Dillon and Butte; all the units of the University of Montana are using a common system. We weren't able to do that before, so just the ease of knowing what was available at Pablo or Dillon or any library throughout the United States or abroad has just turned around dramatically with the advent of all of these online resources.

It doesn't matter whether the University of Montana has limited itself right now because we only have 1.5 million resources; that is fine. It would be nice if we had 10.5 million, but we don't. We can gain access to those 10.5 million without much of a problem. We don't place any undue burden on the user, financial user, it is all a service that this library provides free of charge. Wherever the information is, if we don't have it, we can get it. That is one of the nicest

4

things that I think we've been able to do at this library. We've tried to make it known. We've tried to make the fact [known] that with so much being readily available if we don't own it we can get it for you within a relatively short period of time.

DB: Is that a trend related to online library systems, you know the connection between all the libraries now with online technology, that really libraries aren't judged by their volumes anymore?

EO: I'd say that's getting to be a larger factor. I think it's probably the same extent that universities now are judged. It used to be earlier on that libraries were judged by size, number of circular—size of their collection, size of the staff, size of the budget, size of the circulation. Those are still important ingredients, or telltale signs that give an individual an idea as to what kind of use is being made of that facility. Now even the university is being judged more on qualitative kinds of assessment rather than a quantitative type.

The library, just as in the classroom, it's our requirement now that we respond to our accrediting agencies on how do we affect the learning, how has our service impacted the learning ability of the students? We can no longer say that we—it is no longer good enough just to say that you graduate 4,000 students from the University of Montana. There needs to be new measures taken to assess the effectiveness of that education. That is a relatively new phase that universities throughout the United States have now had to take upon themselves.

It is one of the reasons why we have gone into doing—well, it is one of the reasons we should have been doing them more all along, but we hadn't—doing evaluations of our users. We've engaged in some national evaluation programs that are specifically geared for research libraries and we've piggy-backed onto that. We're not a major research library. A research library from this definition requires you to have a certain size collection, a certain size budget and staff. They're the Yales, the Harvards, the Berkeleys, they're the Columbias. They are the major research libraries in the U.S.

We were still able to participate. We are supposed to do that again this fall where we do an online survey of a select group, all random, a random sample and it's done over a two-week period of time. We're able then to get a—we put the whole demographics of the university in so that we can responses from—when we get the responses we don't know who did it other than we know if it was a freshman or graduate student, or a senior or faculty or staff. We get great information in terms of feedback from our users that tell us what they think of the collections, our services, what we do to serve.

I think libraries in the past have not—I think librarians have always felt, let us be the judge of what we do well. That's no longer the case. We need to know if what we do is positively impacting our users. Are we providing the kinds of services that our users want or need? And if not, why? So, this is one of the assessments that we are doing. We do another assessment for all our instruction, but we have to work on ways of devising even more avenues to verify to

ourselves and to the campus and to our accrediting agencies that, yes, what we do does make a difference.

DB: When most people think of services a library provides they're going to think of well, you put the books in the order that I can go get one when I look it up, and you check it out to me. What a university library, and you know you can talk chronologically about this, how they change, what are some of the programs or services that the library has provided to the student body and faculty?

EO: Well, references, one. Having competent librarians that can assist a user trying to—they have a search need when they come in and hopefully we're able to guide a user through the machinations of information to try to help them find what they need. Interlibrary loan is a service. Reserve books is a service where, for instance, lower level undergrads—but I think there are some even in graduate educatio— but where the faculty member places a set number of resources on reserve and everyone in the class is supposed to read them.

It used to be that, here again where most of those things were in hard copy, now the vast majority are available electronically. It is a case where again this is a service, I don't have to come to the library. I have a family, I work at—I go to school maybe in the morning, I work in the afternoon and I don't get off until 9 at night, then I have to do my studying, so I do my studying after I eat. I eat at 10 o'clock and I work until 3 in the morning, and I can get access to those resources because I have an online access account; so remote access is a service.

Everything that we do hopefully is a relevant service. Yes, putting the books on the shelf is a necessity. If what you find on the shelf isn't there when I am looking for it, we provide an avenue to put a hold on it and once the book is returned or if its mis-shelved, when we find it we notify you and you can get that material. We don't do this; this has sort of been done as a pilot, but we do it for graduate students and we do it for faculty where we have desktop delivery. If you don't have the capability to come to the library we'll deliver the article to you, to your office.

Again, libraries are there to serve, making information available and everyone has very busy schedules and that's a factor. Even this past year when we expanded our hours, that was an extension of our service. We used to close at 11:30 and now we close at 2 a.m. and we used to open at 8 and now we open at 7. Those are all things that are perceived by the user as a service. People in the last survey found that sometimes the library is rather cold, not environmentally cold temperature wise, but cold from the standpoint that it wasn't a warm inviting facility. The carpet had been an issue because some of the floors had the original carpet from when they were laid, when we opened the building 30-some years ago.

You try to create an environment where one feels comfortable and safe, and where it is conducive to study. We try to focus on that and that service is trying to be responsive to user needs. Even a suggestion box: we do an online suggestion box as a service where we try to give

people an opportunity to comment on if something isn't working right. We need to know about it to try to fix it. That's a little bit in terms of service.

I guess one of the impediments to our effectiveness in this building is that everything is sort of restricted more or less to straight-backed chairs and tables; there is not a lot of lounge furniture throughout the building. That was a gamble that we took when the building was first constructed because it was done in two phases. There was money to equip the—furniture wise, the first phase of the building so that we would have had much more seating, a variety of styles of seating throughout the building. But, it is a five-story building: the top two floors, there wasn't sufficient money to fund them. They were constructed but only because we took the money that was earmarked for furnishings and said no, let's finish the building in its entirety, the physical building, and then we'll gamble later on down the road that we'll get money to furnish the building.

I think it was a good move. Building costs certainly aren't what they are now, but construction costs I think would be much more open to inflation and higher costs as opposed to then taking the money and putting it into seating and etcetera. So, we gambled and finished the entire building, but we weren't able to equip the building the way that we had originally hoped to do. But, you know, we've had donors now because of our connection with the U of M Foundation that have helped us build little group study rooms, they've helped create the archives facility and the alcove in front of that, the [Gertrude] Buckhous room, not the Buckhous room. It is the Koch—no, it isn't the Koch—there is the little study room that is right outside of the archives and I am drawing a blank in terms of the name of that room right now [the Theta Rho Room]. Anyway, those were donations that we got from outside monies. With some individuals that have a definite interest in the library, we try to take that and develop it into something that makes the library a much more user-friendly place.

DB: How much has funding shifted from being tuition, or state funding, to private funding through the UM Foundation, or private donors?

EO: Again, I don't have specifics, but it's an area I think we got a start at developing a cadre of supporters that are interested in the library. The library isn't like another academic unit on campus. We don't graduate a core of students like the School of Business, or School of Forestry, or College of Arts and Sciences. Yes, all students are a part of the library and part of the university, but I don't get a degree from the Mansfield Library, I get a degree from an academic unit. So we don't develop a core that become our constituent group—so individuals, I think has always just sort of been taken for granted—but everyone always has had an affinity for libraries. Individuals, during a campaign that the University wages, are always able to earmark some funding for the library and that continues to grow.

We use it for Special Collections, we use it for improvements, we have people that earmark money specifically for new acquisitions, we have donors that give the money that allows the library to use it to buy furniture and so our Friends group continues to increase in size. That is

an area that the library will, as all other academic areas on campus, will need to be working more aggressively on because we have to rely on funding other than what we get from the state. It is a growing area of interest and one that we'll continue to work on. We have some friends that live throughout the U.S. that are just very dedicated to the University of Montana and the Mansfield Library, and have made significant contributions and continued to have the library be a part of their will, so it is very gratifying.

DB: I've grown up going to libraries and I don't recall the amount of displays I see in libraries now and that is true in this library as well. Almost every floor near the stairs or near where you go onto the floor there is some sort of display that revolves around a collection, or thematically certain books. Am I perceiving that right? Is that something that has increased something new?

EO: You're saying you see it here, or you're not seeing it here?

DB: I am seeing it here.

EO: Well, I think—

DB: Is that part of warming the library up?

EO: I definitely think it should be considered that way. We don't do probably as much as we could. Display cases are expensive. Display cases are time-intensive. Good displays do take a lot of energy, but I think [patrons] find them fascinating. Again I think the ones that have been developed through Archives and Special Collections have just been outstanding. That collection contains the unique elements that this library has that no other libraries have because they are unique to us and that is what forms a special collection, so you want to showcase those.

I think it would be nice to have more displays so that people—I don't know, my feeling is that you almost need to hit people over the head frequently just to alert them to the neat information that is here. It comes from government documents; it comes from all aspects of the collection. This is such a dynamic time that we live in and just trying to get a handle on all the information; where do I go to find it and how easily accessible is it? I think we could do more, we could do more to make it a little bit—even having displays in more places in the building. I think it is an important aspect of what we do. We need to try to showcase what we have and advertise what we have. You have to try to be out in front, in-your-face type of approach to just make sure that people are aware of some of the things that perhaps they hadn't thought of.

DB: You know earlier in the conversation you said that number of volumes, things like that still matters, staff size, to some degree but that also libraries are judged by their specificity, their strengths in collection. Now you've used the word 'unique' collections that the university has. Describe those unique qualities of this library. What's unique about the volumes or the collections here? What are the special collections, what are the government documents?

EO: Well, ok, keeping it brief, government documents, that's a special collection not in the traditional sense but it is with regards to this library. We're the regional depository for the State of Montana, which means that basically every government document that the U.S. government makes available, and the government supposedly makes everything available that transpires as a part of the federal government. We should be getting every publication that is made available through the government printing office; that is a rich resource. Then the focus is going to be shifted to Archives and Special Collections.

I'll start with Archives first. Archives are our original resource material. They consist of photographs and these photographs are ones that we have collected from donors; sometimes I think we have purchased some. They are mainly historical photographs. Just as you are doing an oral history and capturing someone's recollection of a particular era for which they lived and worked, the photographs are doing the same thing. Photographs are used by students, by faculty, they are on display throughout the city. They are used by historical publications. When someone tries to do a renovation they look at a historical photograph of a building say on Higgins Street, Higgins Avenue, and find out just what that building looked like. Our photographs are an irreplaceable collection and pictorial history of this part of the country.

We focus on western Montana and MSU focuses mainly on the eastern part of the state. The Historical Society sort of tries to cover a balance throughout the state. We try to collect in the areas that we are close to. We have business records, we have ledgers of early business records, we have manuscripts of western Montana authors, and some connected with the university, others not. We have university records from professors; as an employee of the university, records that you maintain, correspondence that you maintain could be considered as archival material and could be part of an archives collection.

We have memorabilia which isn't always part of an archives collection, but memorabilia sometimes being Indian artifacts, memorabilia being photographs, memorabilia being gifts that an individual was given. That leads me into senatorial papers; those are all original like the Mansfield collection, the Murray Collection, the Metcalf Collection. All of these Montana-related figures, their congressional, senatorial papers are all part of the archives collections. Those are not duplicated anywhere else, so scholars that are working in that aspect of information would use this collection.

The Special Collections were not all that—our Special Collections are primarily going to be focused on Montana, the west, Montana authors, and books written, not necessarily by Montanans, but about the state. Our focus is all going to be Montana-related. Someone comes to Montana to use our resource because in large part they are not going to be found in other parts of the U.S. I say Montana [but] we broaden that to some extent to sort of include the Northwest. Then you can say, well, even then that means sometimes we get up into B.C. and Alberta just because they are surrounding us too. When you try to draw a geographic boundary, sometimes those are a little bit difficult and when you start dealing with Native Americans, then that even gets a little bit more broad. Do you just include Native Americans from west of the

Mississippi? The challenges are great in terms of just getting as much information as you can. But, there are limits financially and physically because we don't have room to put it—archives is almost burgeoning at the seams now.

DB: Any other strengths in the collection here at the university?

EO: All of our strengths need to be reflective of the disciplines. For instance, we award a Ph.D. in forestry, so our collections there need to be more inclusive and more international in scope than a program for which we only offer a bachelor degree. We should have—I think that you would find that our sciences, well, I am not going to go any further in terms of strengths. I think our collections will revolve around the particular academic department. If what we offer is a bachelor's degree those collections are not going to be as extensive as if we offered a master's or a Ph.D. The extent of the program then requires you, even for that program to be accredited, requires you to have a larger number of resources.

I'll use the forestry [program] as I did. You know if you were only going to have a bachelor's level program, then you could probably get away with just having materials that relate to Montana and the Northwest. But, if you have graduate level programs and doctorate level programs, then you have to have collections that are reflective of the world, because our graduates then are not necessarily going to focus on just staying in the Northwest. They may go abroad and they are going to have to deal with tropical forests, and they are going to have to deal with all sorts of things that you wouldn't find restricted to a forest in Montana or the Northwest. Again, the collection tries to picture what we have as an academic unit. The key is to keep building new things and adding to that collection and maybe discarding older things.

DB: I am only aware of the law school at UM that has its own library. What is the relationship between UM library, Mansfield Library, and the law library?

EO: Well administratively we are separate. That is normally the case with law schools throughout the U.S. But, I mean we're partners from the standpoint that they use the same online system that we do. They're budgeted differently; their budget is separate from ours. We meet periodically just to discuss strategies, but they are separate.

There used to be—when I first came we used to have lots of little departmental libraries. We had a journalism library, we had a forestry library, we had a chemistry library, we had lots of small science collections and there still are a few little splinter collections around. By and large the idea was that we needed to centralize them and we needed to bring everything within this building. First, from the standpoint of it's not cost effective to run a whole series of departmental libraries because you have separate staffs. For the most part those collections were not very readily accessible, they had limited hours so users might find that the materials would be in the catalogue, or on the online catalogue but it didn't do you much good if you started searching at 8 o'clock and then found out that that library had closed at 5.

Department libraries—Illinois is a big campus and they still have departmental libraries throughout; probably something in the neighborhood of 20. That takes an extraordinary amount of money to fund. Some of those are in brand new facilities. When I was in Finland at the University of Helsinki, that university, and it dates back into—it is like 365 years old, had over 100 little departmental libraries. Those were developed sort of on the European model where little faculties—the faculty of theology had their own little library and the faculty of law had theirs. Those libraries were developed by the faculties and those disciplines. There's lots of tradition there that aren't easily—you don't break those kinds of trends with scholars when they said hey we were the ones responsible for that. They had their own library and that librarian is like a brother or sister to those faculty because they all work very closely with one another. That librarian knows everything in that collection and it is like you have your own personal librarian working for you. But, those models are changing and even changing at Helsinki.

DB: So we've mostly been talking about the library at large. You know you mentioned you were first hired here as the Director of Public Services. How has your career changed in 35 years?

EO: Well, it's changed—I don't know. Basically I am glad I've held the same position for almost the same length of time that I have been here. It has changed in the responsibilities. When I went to library school I never anticipated being more or less a manager of people; I just always pictured myself as being someone on the other side of a desk helping someone with a research need. It's changed in that I've gone back for lots of work with management techniques and interpersonal relations within an organization. Those are important aspects and those are skills that, yes, you can obtain some of them on the job, but you need some formal background and training; so that's changed, that's been a responsibility that I've had to work on.

Then I also had the responsibility of taking on our assessment projects and that was also a new venture. I needed to go again away to workshops and programs that accrediting agencies make available. One, just to find out about what the survey would entail, but then what do you do with that information that you collect and how do you incorporate it into your organization? That's been a change.

I guess one of the things that I feel most strongly about regarding my career here was that I had a rather specific responsibility, but I also had a great deal of latitude and flexibility as a professional individual, as a faculty member. That allowed me and the university, and the state I think to embark on lots of neat ventures. One of the projects that I started on shortly after I came was working with another librarian from MSU at Bozeman. Again, you sort of have to revert back 35 years and we started a project where, and it sounds extremely simple now, but it wasn't at that point, we started collecting libraries' holdings of periodicals. We could find out what journals the library at Havre subscribed to and what the libraries at Miles City, and Kalispell. So we started doing a union list of Montana serials. It was a massive undertaking. But, it was a project that led ultimately to a statewide system for identifying periodicals.

Periodicals are one of the more expensive [areas]. Well, now online resources are the most expensive, but periodicals have always been traditionally more expensive than monographs for the most part, especially when you get into scientific journals. When Montana has always dealt—no one has as much money as you want, so you've always been dealing with a limited amount of resources, so you try to maximize the use of those resources. Doing a union list allowed us to share that information with libraries and individuals throughout the state so that you could find out where these things existed and how far the run went back. Not that interlibrary loan didn't exist before then because it did, but then by utilizing interlibrary loan you could get those materials sent to you in a relatively short period of time. That was a big thing.

On the next project we worked with the University of Minnesota and had that information moved from a paper list to a microfilm list, microfiche. Then ultimately all that information got translated to an online source and became part of what we've done in the region. First with the Northwest, there was the Washington Library network that Washington—but it was in the Northwest and it included resources from Alaska, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. I think that's it, I think it was those five. We were doing things regionally trying to make those resources available.

That and the library has moved itself on campus to be a much more identifiable source. I think that only needs to continue to mature because we need to work very closely with the faculty and the academic units. We jointly work with one another on helping our students learn. I think that these are challenging times for people to harness all of this information and try to feel like "I have a capable hand in investigating information," and "I know which are the best sources to use," and "I know that I need to identify, I need to be able to identify what's valid information out there and what may be just run of the mill stuff."

I think those kinds of relationships will continue to develop and they need to because instruction in the classroom is changing and we need to change along with it. I see us in a real good, strong place right now and I think that is only going to continue to improve, hopefully.

DB: Great, well since you breached the subject of the future for the library, that's kind of where I'd like to have you finish up. Going online certainly was a big step in the library; people have talked about how the Internet will be the end of books and the end of people reading print on paper. Thirty-five years from now are there still going to be books out on the stacks there?

EO: I don't know. I'm not much with crystal balls. I've had—it's an interesting place that I find myself in because I startle people sometimes when I tell them that I've been in my position for as long as I have. I think it's—for younger people it's difficult, I think, to ever envision yourself being in one institution or one job for 30 or 35 years. I think the mindset with lots of people now is that five or six years and then I am going to change and do something different, or I'm going to—whether it is the same kind of job or different all together I don't know.

So I've seen a lot that's transpired. I find myself in sort of a quandary as to where we are with this flow of information. I had an email last week from a colleague who started a library product that is associated with reserves. He's now, his company has been purchased by another library vendor, and he is now looking to change his job. He's contemplating going into library work, not as a librarian, but providing another kind of library service. He asked me some questions in the email as to "is this a good idea?" He's asking me for my feedback as to would this be a marketable thing in the future? I told him that I have problems answering that. I am somewhat skeptical because I thought his approach was rather very rigid. He wanted to have some sort of canned type responses so that if a user was having difficulty finding something, how to use a particular database, there would be an icon associated with that database. The individual could come up with maybe a quick tutorial.

My reaction was, well that kind of stuff has been thought of and I said, if your system allowed the individual to program the specific requests that he was searching for and get a response to that, rather than looking through a bunch of canned responses, then I think it would be more marketable. I think it has to be dynamic, it has to be interactive and any kind of a system that throws something out and says that is answering all the needs I don't think is going to work.

So, I am not sure where we are in this information curve; whether we're at the threshold, whether we are at the mid-way mark, or whether we're on the downhill side. I doubt we are on the downhill side. I don't know that there ever will be a downhill side. There's a lot going on right now. I just think we are in a real big mix right now because there are competing forces. I mean we have Google, that's a major information player now, and there will be others. These are not library entities and one of the major aspects, one of the major questions that libraries, I think especially academic libraries, have to address is the fact of being relevant.

It's not good enough just to say that, okay, here is the Mansfield Library, here is the physical facility, here are the contents contained within the Mansfield Library. You could have people. Well, now they don't have to come into the building, but libraries require a large infusion of monies. Universities require a large infusions of monies, hence increased tuitions. So administrators who run universities have to say, where is our money best spent? Unless libraries can give evidence of the fact that they do make a difference, they are important, and they continue to need to be funded and are relevant and can only be relevant by providing the information needs that our users want and need— then unless we are able to fulfill that, it puts us in jeopardy.

I'm one that thinks we will always have books. I've seen demonstrations with these little laptop readers and I can't get into that myself very well. I think there is a laptop service that's needed when I had an article or I need a section, but to read a novel or to read a huge textbook from cover to cover on a computer, I just don't see that happening. Whether I don't know where talking books will go, maybe that just continues to increase. I don't see—a bigger thing or a problem we have is making sure we preserve the information we do have and we got lots of information because of the quality of the paper is deteriorating, so that's an issue. Another

problem is if libraries nationwide, worldwide, if they have to cut back, then what we are buying may be more scarce in terms of trying to get ahold of that information down the road. If we didn't buy it, MSU didn't buy it, and a hundred other universities in the U.S. didn't buy it then only a few select have, and are they going to be able to make it available to everyone else?

I think it will be interesting to see what comes with electronic books. We are buying more and more electronic books. It is great for distance education. I think it is in some cases. It's great, especially with reference books, where you only want a segment of it, but when you have a complete treatise from cover to cover I have more difficulty with that. I think it will be interesting what lies on the horizon for us. I just hope that we are all prepared to continue to adjust to change. Change is the big key word and relevance is the other one. I think you just—there's no—I think every day is sort of a new challenge and that makes libraries a very interesting and dynamic profession to be in right now, but you do have to be one that is willing to take some risk and change, and change again if what change you made wasn't proven to be worthwhile. Flexibility, adaptability, I think all of those things are going to be crucial to what kind of a role we play in the future.

DB: Great. Well thank you. I don't have anything else unless your final comments—

EO: I think I have said enough. I don't know, it's sort of rather generalistic, but—

DB: Well, I appreciate your time and your thoughts.

EO: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]