

Interviewee: James Grunwald	Division: Mathematics / Science, Education
Years of service to MLC: 22	Years of service to the church at large: 40

Bode: This is an Archives interview of retiring Professor James Grunwald, recorded on May 23, 2017, by Interim Archives Coordinator Lois Bode. Good morning, Prof. Grunwald.

Grunwald: Good morning, Lois.

Bode: Thank you for agreeing to this interview for the Martin Luther College Archives. You're concluding 40 years of service to the church at large, of which 19 were served in the math/science division or education division at Martin Luther College, right?

Grunwald: Correct.

Bode: What was your greatest concern when you began your teaching career as an emergency teacher in Neillsville, Wisconsin?

Grunwald: Well, coming into a new classroom, or my first classroom—of course you always have some concerns about that too—but one of my biggest concerns was I had 36 students in one room of seventh and eighth graders, and just how do you fit that many desks in a room? And then how do you fit all of the various courses or, you know, various subject areas . . . and then, if you have some divisions for math grouping and things like that? So it was tough to get everything into the school day. And then also, I was asked to help coach basketball, and other things they often add on to teachers. (Bode: Wow!)

Bode: Did that concern turn out to be justified, or just typical nerves of being a new teacher?

Grunwald: Well, yeah, you have the initial nerves—they weren't justified. I still had to fit all the students into the classroom, though, and teach the various subjects. They did find someone else to teach the basketball though, to coach that. (Bode: OK) So that was good.

Bode: How about when you began as the director of academic computing at MLC in 1998?

Grunwald: Well, again, you do have the concern of coming into a new position, a new location, but as far as academic abilities, I really didn't have concerns there. I had been teaching in WELS high schools for the past 17 years, had completed two master's degrees during that time, and had completed all of my coursework for my PhD program in educational technology, so I was confident about my teaching abilities and my subject area. Another concern is when you come into a new area, learning everyone's name—various faculty and staff, and the students as well.

Bode: What in your time in ministry makes you want to recommend ministry to others?

Grunwald: Well, for me it's just the joy of working with others on a daily basis where Christ is a solid foundation for all that we do. In a public classroom, and I grew up in the public school setting all the way through high school, it's just not the same as a WELS classroom. In the WELS classroom you can freely use God's Word in all that you do, whether that be classroom management or teaching academic material or just visiting with students and parents.

Bode: So, speaking of teaching academic material . . . curious—do you have a favorite, or least favorite, course to teach, and why?

Grunwald: Well, that's always a loaded question—on how you might answer that. I really have a love for technology and working with technology, and when I came to MLC, Computer Applications was the only course that I taught and we had five sections of that the first years as well. That later morphed into Digital Literacy and now, eventually, Teaching with Technology. So, that's always been my favorite area. I think the Teaching with Technology course now is the best of those various versions of the course that we've had over the years, because I think it's really better preparing our students for the classrooms that they'll actually be entering. I also have been privileged to teach some graduate level courses online, so I also enjoy those courses. Teaching Online is one course, Designing and Constructing Online Courses, and another course, Enhancing the Curriculum with Technology. And, of those, I really do enjoy the Teaching Online and the Designing and Constructing Online Courses, because it's just a joy to help instructors learn how to teach online because it is not necessarily the same as the way you would do things in the regular face-to-face classroom. Since you did bring up least favorite, I was asked to teach Economics for a number of years, a case where we needed someone to teach it and they found out, well, I had had an Economics course back in my college days at UW-Madison; therefore I must know something about it, which is true. But I obviously was not as qualified as someone else that would have studied more in that particular area.

Bode: OK, that's a lot of students, Professor. What are three words that would describe you?

Grunwald: Well, I think I'm very organized, I'm very dependable, and patient with helping others.

Bode: Good qualities to have as a teacher. While you've completed a brief description of yourself, now tell me what about you do you think students will remember most?

Grunwald: Well, I think they found that I was easy to get along with in the classroom as their instructor. They did find out that I was very detail-oriented, so if it was looking for something in the instructions for the assignment, I would notice if it wasn't there. And I think they also found that I was very willing to sit down on a one-to-one basis and help a student who might be struggling with something.

Bode: Over all those years, especially at MLC, what major changes have you seen and how do you evaluate them?

Grunwald: Well, the changes in technology obviously have been very enormous since 1998 when I came to MLC. So, just the available technology to the faculty and the students, and also the changes that Network Services was able to help bring forward over that time. Really, it's Network Services that helps to drive the use and facilitate the use of technology at MLC. Another big change over the years was the advent of online learning in general, and then also the online master's degree program at MLC, which we first started working on in 1999—so that program really has blossomed over the years too, and just the amount of online courses that we offer throughout the school year.

Bode: I get the sense that these were really positive changes?

Grunwald: They were—yes, right—very much so. Technology . . . it's always hard to keep up, because technology keeps changing so much from one year to the next. But I feel MLC has done an admirable job in keeping up with the times.

Bode: You're director of academic computing at MLC. As director, I see that you've given quite a few presentations about the use of technology. Is there something you would advise a new teacher using technology in the classroom to never forget?

Grunwald: Well, yes. I would have a few suggestions: First of all, don't use technology just because it's available or you can do it. There should always be a good reason, a relative advantage to making use of technology in a particular lesson. Perhaps it's to help explain something better or to do something more efficiently. On the other extreme, too, we don't want to simply ignore the use of the technology and not make use of it at all, because it can be used to help improve teaching and learning. But if you're just starting with technology, you want to start small; don't try to do too many things at once. Pick a particular area or course where you are going to integrate it and then just do it well.

Bode: I have a question about some of the memories you might have from your teaching career. You can go the entire career, or you can go—I see that you were a student at DMLC—you could even go there. What are some favorite memories?

Grunwald: Well, I don't necessarily dwell on specific memories. I just recall coming from UW-Madison, transferring to DMLC back in the mid-70s, and it was just a joy to be on a smaller, close-knit campus than the university complex at UW-Madison—so that was a quite positive memory (change) there. Over the years at MLC, and working in the WELS, I just simply have really enjoyed working with the students and the faculties, especially to help improve their use of technology in the educational environment.

Bode: Now, usually as Lutherans we don't tell everybody about our accomplishments, but I know that they're there, and I know that they are important in God's work. What are one or two of your proudest

professional accomplishments?

Grunwald: Well, coming to MLC in 1998, it was to be the first MLC director of academic computing. So, just moving technology forward, its use by the faculty and students at MLC over the years, I think has been an accomplishment. Another one that involves the WELS, even beyond MLC, was that MLC became a leader in the use of online distance education. The synod certification correspondence courses that MLC used to do were converted to an online format beginning in 2000, and those courses have continued and, of course, many other courses have been created in more recent years. As mentioned before, the MLC Master of Science in Education degree program basically was a synod convention in 1999 that directed MLC to move forward in this area. So in 2000, I started meeting with John Isch and Dave Wendler, as we put that program together and then wrote up the proposal to the Higher Learning Commission to get approval for that. And that just really has blossomed over the years as well. And then another side to all of this was ALHS Online, which I helped to start six years ago. ALHS Online is an online course provider to bring online courses to the area Lutheran high schools, so that they can share their resources with instructors and thereby increase their curricular offerings. The first year that we offered courses, we had 60 student seats over the two semesters, and five courses through the first semester and through the second. This past year—the sixth year, which we just completed—we had 21 WELS high schools make use of those courses in some way. And we've also now expanded into offering Algebra 1 and Spanish to the Lutheran elementary schools in the WELS, and we had 12 schools participating in that this year as well. We had 24 courses each semester this past year, with over 250 student seats in those courses each of the semesters. So that's another area that really has been growing. So, overall at MLC, I think just the explosion of online distance education over the years that I have been here.

Bode: Thank you for that. I think we often don't know or aren't aware of all of the different things that are going on, things like this. I have to ask you . . . anything else that you'd like to tell us that I haven't thought to ask you?

Grunwald: I really don't have anything to add in that area right now. (Bode: Nothing humorous? You like your office? What?) I've been in this same office all the time that I've been here, and that's not always the typical situation for faculty at MLC.

Bode: That's true, that's true. Well, what are your plans for retirement?

Grunwald: Well, I will continue to see to the day-to-day operations of ALHS Online, since I have accepted a retirement call to be their superintendent. I'll also continue teaching in the online graduate program for MLC, as well as advising my 20-some graduate advisees. I also will be continuing to assist MLC with the coordination of online distance learning activities in the coming school year, as we make the transition to a new director of academic computing and online learning. My wife also has a list of a few projects that she would like me to complete around the house. (Bode: Of course!) I do enjoy yardwork and working around the house, and things like that. Usually it's just a matter of finding time to fit everything

in. I also enjoy playing disc golf, and since our house is located off of basket 7 at Nehls Park, I hope to get out there more. And my wife will be teaching a few more years at St. Paul's School in New Ulm, and once she retires we hope to do some traveling as well.

Bode: Sounds like life is going to be full for you in retirement.

Grunwald: Yes, I hope it's not as busy as it currently has been these last years of teaching.

Bode: Professor Grunwald, MLC's Archives and, I'm certain, those who hear or read this interview years from now will appreciate what you have graciously shared with us today. We wish you God's richest blessings, and your wife as well, during your retirement.

Grunwald: Thank you!

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