

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Paul Ancel

Interviewer: Valla McLean

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VM: This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project on February 14, 2019, with Paul Ancel in Edmonton, Alberta. This is Valla McLean, university Archivist. I like to begin with asking you how you first became involved with Grant MacEwan Community College, and if you remember the year of that?

PA: Yes, it was – I believe 1976 early on in 1976, it may have been the later part of 1975. The college was relatively new at that point, and they were in the process of looking for some programming areas to develop the college. In one of those areas, they were looking at through the business programming area was, in fact, travel training. They were offering some courses in travel training, travel agency training and an approach was made to probably half a dozen of us in the business community - whether we would be interested in participating and help develop a program that studies to train travel agents, travel consultants, for our industry which was having trouble getting properly trained people in an ever-expanding industry at that point. A number of us, I guess - I think there were probably six of us - from various aspects of the travel industry, agency, airline, I don't think there were any hotels involved, and we got together with Lucille Rudiak who at that point was sort of looking after the business division under Jack Cooper who is the Dean of the business division at that point. And we sat down and developed sort of a program. We tried to base it on the perimeters of what the institution was looking for, which was, in fact, the two-year training diploma program to train travel agents specifically for the travel industry. Not airline employees, and I don't mean to denigrate them in any way, shape, or form, but this was specifically to train

travel agents [pen tapping on the table] of which I was one at that point and, so we sat down. We talked about some perimeters that would fit within the guidelines of the institution and the training process. None of us were educated, [pen tapping on the table] in fact, none of us were even academics. But we knew what we needed in order to develop a trained travel consultant. So that's what happened. We got together; we put a program together. I was asked if I would be interested in joining the institution at that point in helping develop it as a full-time staff member. I examined the opportunities of that and the future and so on, and there were a number of things that were very attractive. So, I consented to be a part of the development and the implementation of the program. So I joined MacEwan in August of 1977, in preparation for the September session to get the thing rolling and we had a few courses going. It was primarily a few courses within the business division, and then within a couple of years it sort of mushroomed into the development of a free-standing travel diploma program, two-years September April, September April, Summer off in the middle [pen tapping on the table] and that's what happened. We put out the word, and we had the support of the travel industry in the city to do this. And so, away we went. And we took in, we had an intake of two cohorts of thirty, and it stayed that way. I believe, is still that way, it may not be quite that large now, but it stayed that way and, we graduated our first diploma program - I think in 1979 - I think our first graduates came out, as a full diploma graduate. And we ran at pretty close to capacity; in fact, we had way more applicants than we could possibly accommodate, and we had a pretty high ratio of success as far as placement was concerned within the travel industry. Most of which went to travel agencies, the odd one went to an airline. But generally speaking, it was, as I mentioned earlier, a pretty

well geared to the travel agency industry. So that's where it started, and that's where it still is, and, still successful at it, I gather. The community college was a good thing for this, not only for those who participated as students but also for staff and, primarily, for the industry that we served. We kept pretty close tabs on what the requirements were, and they were ever-changing at that point. Particularly due to technology. They were ever-changing at that point, and, so long as we were able to maintain and get the necessary funding to maintain the training program, to incorporate all the technology that was coming upon us, we had pretty good success.

VM: And you taught courses in the program as well? –

PA: Yes, I did –

VM: And what were some of the courses you taught?

PA: I taught courses, and as the thing was developed, obviously, I had release time. But for me, there was no interest in just being an administrator. I was really interested in being a participant in the learning process by training the students in the classroom, so I think we were required to take - our full load was five courses, and I had a three-course release time. So, I taught two courses over the period of time and administrated the program.

VM: And what types – do you remember any of the courses that you taught specifically?

PA: My involvement was primarily in the airline industry because that was my interest.

VM: Okay.

PA: So, I taught airline ticketing and procedures, and everything related to airlines, the selling of airlines.

VM: And what campus was the program originally –

PA: The campus that we started at was Assumption on 97 street, the old nunnery, and, so we hung out there for a couple of years, and then our program moved to Jasper Place - now the orange HUB, -

VM: Right.

PA: And we were in there, in the basement underground for - and I say that because it was kinda neat - but, we had our own little plant down at the far South corner I guess, of one of those buildings, and we stayed there until Seventh Street Plaza came on hand at 107th Street, the North Tower I guess we occupied and so the business division of which we were a part of, moved down to, 107th Street plaza and we were in there for a couple of years. Then the funding was finally made available thanks to the Don Getty and a few people that were around at that point and, John Ramsey and a few others that were quite involved in the community and with the college in getting the funding to build this monster of a campus that you and I are sitting at now. The interesting part about that was that it was the first opportunity that any of us had had to develop our own facilities to custom-make them because it was a new building. We were always in rented facilities before the business division, so you dealt with four walls and a desk and a phone, and whatever else you could scrounge to do what you had to do, and that was the realities of it. But we had a unique opportunity to develop our own campus and our own space within the campus, and so we moved over here. And –

VM: Did you –

PA: Over here being –

VM: Any special – Sorry. Yes. Our city centre campus.

PA: Our city centre campus –

VM: Yes.

PA: Correct.

VM: Were there any special requests that you remember making? You mentioned that you sort of got to design your own –

PA: Yeah, we were primarily interested in making sure at that point with the growing technology that we had a necessary computer lab and that we were able to make arrangements with, at that point, was Air Canada. We were doing our training on computers at their reservation site in downtown Edmonton on Jasper Avenue because they wouldn't allow us to have the hardware or the software within our own campus. And so, students used to scoot down a couple of blocks up the street on Jasper to get their training for computers. Then we developed a computer lab, and I wanted a particular sales lab where we could, we had a tiered lab which is down here now in the fifth street building, with a booth where we could monitor and we did interactive sales training and that kind of stuff, and that particular lab, so those two particularly and that there was enough capacity to have a little board room because we were very involved - we being the travel program - were very involved in the industry and its affairs by participating in, outside in the travel business community. So, we needed a capacity to

have people come on board for either part-time lecturing or visits or just involvement with us. It was key not to be isolated from the community that we served. So those kinds of facilities we got, we got proper office space that was businesslike, because that's what we were. No disrespect to the academia, they have their role, but we also had ours. We wanted to make sure that we were able to grow the program with the respect of the industry, and also with the agreement of those students who participated, who felt they were joining an industry and are not just here to take it - a training program where they could travel all over the world for nothing and then not have to do anything - That's not what we were in. We were actually training a working travel consultant who works in a travel industry, and that's what we did. With remarkable success, we certainly had very, very high placement records; they were in the nineties.

VM: And what do you remember about the student body in those early days? Can you think of anything that stands out about the students that came?

PA: Well I think, you know, the institution at that point was going through a sort of a first come first serve basis, where if you applied, you were able to join so long as you met the number's requirement and obviously - well maybe, it's not obvious - but we always interviewed more than we had the capacity for because of those who'd also change their mind or didn't realize what they were getting into or whatever, but we decided whether it was wise or not - in the end, it ended up being wise - but the institution wasn't really happy with me particularly, I'm quite outspoken as you know [pen clicking] and we felt it was really important that we'd be fair to the applicant to ensure, that in our opinion - our opinion being the travel counselors and managers and the instructors - that there was a reasonable chance of success at the back end when they got out. And that they

weren't in it for reasons that weren't what they should be. And so, we interviewed everybody, and we probably ended up interviewing an excessive two hundred fifty applicants for the sixty positions that we had available. So, there was a selection process, and we had a number of tests and interviews, a lot of them were just conversational. You know, I've been around for a long time then and so had my staff, we had a pretty good idea who could make it and who couldn't by just saying hello. That's maybe exaggerating a little bit but, in a sense, that we, you had a pretty good idea. Their personal presentation, did they show up to the interview well-dressed, well-groomed, and were reasonably well-spoken and didn't just answer yes or no to questions that you had, had some opinions, whether you agreed with them or not was not important, but that they had them was important. And so, we made our selections based on that process, and that proved to be successful. Much to the chagrin of the institution, but we did it, and we got away with it, and, just a matter of aside, it was interesting. I don't mind saying this now, this library that we're sitting in, the John Haar Library, John was the president when I joined, and one of his daughters applied to get into the program and this is when we were out at the West End Campus and didn't meet the qualifications. I rejected her and the first call the next morning when I got into work was from John Haar, he says, would you come up to my office please and I went up and, I knew what it was going to be because his daughter had obviously not been accepted to the program. He says, what's this all about, so I told him, he said thank you very much, and that was the end of the conversation. And, so that's the kind of place that was Grant MacEwan. –

VM: Yes -

PA: At that point –

VM: Yes –

PA: It was very personal, and I realised it now, the institution is of that size that it can't probably be that way anymore, which is understandable, maybe not the way it should be, but hey, it is what it is.

VM: So, you talked about John L. Haar and Lucy as being some of the -

PA: Lucille.

VM: Lucille. Who were some of the other administrators and instructors around that time that stand out for you, that you remember?

PA: Well, one that I keep in touch with, I don't know if you heard the name or not, Terry Flannigan, who was Vice President at that point and was very involved with the Foundation. We did a lot of work with the Foundation, particularly when they were doing the Mad Hatter's awards and, that kind of thing. He got that going, and we participated because we got travel prizes for auction, and you know that kind of thing. And so, Terry Flannigan for sure, and he's still around, retired in Kelowna, and we keep in touch at least once a year at Christmas and Chuck Day who was Academic Vice President at that point, I think one of the centers in this building is named after him, and he was the VP. John Haar has, of course, passed away and Carla who was a graduate of the program, Carla Lemaire is now the - I think they call them associate professors now –

VM: Right, yes.

PA: And she runs the travel program, and she has a couple working for her that are also graduates, so you know, graduates became involved.

VM: Did you have any interaction or meet Dr. MacEwan? While you were –

PA: I knew Dr. MacEwan actually before I even joined the college or before his name was even associated with this. I happened to be in quite active in Kiwanis, the Kiwanis service club organisation, and Dr. MacEwan was as well. He was a lieutenant governor of our division when I lived in Calgary at that point and, so I knew him although we weren't buddies, but I certainly knew him and so yes, I did interact with Dr. MacEwan and with Heather as well, and, great guy, you know. And other instructors I, I'm trying to think who's around, [pen clicking] but you know, a number of us, unfortunately, have passed away but there was a group of us that gathered every morning for coffee. And I mean, every morning. I would come in usually about seven, and got myself organized for the day. At seven-thirty, we'd meet at the cafeteria, and this was, not only at Assumption but also at the west end and also at Seventh Street and also here. The same group. That was a cohort that worked for me, and unfortunately, he's not well now, Ron Campbell and Terry Flannigan and Andy Palass and Bruce Vincent, and they're still around, and Kay Feehan who was social services at that point. Social work, I guess it was called at that point – chair of Social Work -

VM: Right.

PA: She used to join us quite regularly for coffee, occasionally Paul Byrne would drop down and see us, but we had that coffee rink, and the other one was Andy Blake - I don't know if you know Andy's name or not - Andy was Chair and founder of the police

program, police training program and we solved the world's problems and MacEwan's problems, at least we thought we did every morning between seven-thirty and eight o'clock. And off we went to work and our appropriate roles. Unfortunately, Andy has passed away, I know, Bruce and I meet regularly, and Andy and I think that's – Kay I have not seen, but I know she's still around, but I have not seen her, hopefully, one day. I think it's really excellent that the retirees have finally formed something and that they have got some funding to do it - well I don't know if they've got some funding if they haven't they should be and will be working on getting that - So around me, all the retirees of MacEwan University as they now call it - in fact, there are no university people –

VM: No –

PA: Because none of them are retired yet –

VM: Yes.

PA: So, it's all college people, and I think their numbers are up in the hundred and fifties now as far as they have. I know I have the number three certificate, so I joined quite early, and I was in Calgary at that point, and it's really nice to see these people and to keep in touch with them, and, like everybody else we're getting on but I just had my eightieth birthday yesterday so there we are, you know –

VM: Happy belated birthday.

PA: Thank you. So that's a brief sort of overview. I felt, and I think a lot of people did at that point that this was a community college that needed to be involved in the community. It wasn't that we were just academia teaching; it's that we were involved in

all aspects of the running of the institution and the development of the institution. We served on committees not only within the college but also outside the college. I'm a founding member of Edmonton Crime Stoppers. I was on the Board of the Economic Development Edmonton and a number of other things. Certainly, the travel industry nationally as well as provincially and locally is developing a rapport with the people we served in the community and the relationship intertwined with what we were doing here at MacEwan, because that was important, that people outside the institution knew who we were and what we were doing and that we had the support and the understanding at least of the development and where this place was hopefully going to go, and it developed. I guess the only thing I don't particularly care for now or understand it is, it seems to be a little bit losing the community college aspect of it, and I find that regrettable, quite frankly. But again, it is what it is, and I can't do too much about it. It's like the elephant trying to move – or the mouse trying to move the elephant – and that's beyond my capacity now. But so, that's sort of where we started it. I think MacEwan would not be what it was today had it not been for those of us who were here at the founding level –

VM: Absolutely!

PA: And that includes all of us. Because we came from all facets of life, business life, academic life, and the college developed into what it is now, which is an institution of which I'm very proud because it is a fine place. It is. Lots of good people here and you saw the rapport when I saw Michelle. I haven't seen her for eighteen years. That's the kind of rapport we had, she recognised me, and that's the kind of meaningful inner relationship that we have with people here. We were firm and very outspoken,

particularly myself. I am set in my ways, which can be good or bad, as you and I have found out, unfortunately, but that's what it's about, you know. That's what it's about.

VM: Do you remember any sort of particular staff events or memorable events that stand out from your time period at the community college?

PA: Well, I guess, one of the things was the development by Terry and the participation by a lot of us in the Mad Hatter's ball that was really a hell of a lot of fun. I was thinking about it last night actually - on the plane coming back from Toronto on the weekend - we used to do a Christmas gig. I don't know if you've heard about this or not because I don't know how many you've interviewed or whatever but, we used to do Christmas caroling when the students were all gone. Between the time they left mid-December, and we closed down for holidays, and one of our cleaning staff, facility staff, Tony who used to deliver the mail and that kind of stuff, and he drove the little mail cart around and Cathryn Heslep who is pretty good on the keys. So, we put a little cart together and put a small piano keyboard on the cart, and a number of us, and a couple of us dressed as Santa Claus Allen McQueen for a while, he was chair of the travel program - or, sorry of the accounting program - and a big guy. Like I mean, a big guy. Unfortunately, he's not with us anymore. Still, Alan McQueen and then myself, we used to take turns at being Santa Claus. We gathered on the morning of this thing; when we did this, in that sales lab that I told you about, it was all tiered down in our area and to the consternation of some. Still, the enjoyment of others, we had a few bottles of Bailey's out there and song sheets printed up and dressed in Santa Claus, we had a big bag full of candy canes and that kind of stuff. And a long extension cord to the keyboard and Mike Rossanova would drive the little cart, and Cathryn would be on the back with the

keyboards. We'd plugin and go from everywhere, including the dressing rooms of the Rec Centre – the Health and Wellness Centre, whatever they call that, that's there now – and we sang Christmas carols. So that was just – and I don't think they do that anymore –

VM: No.

PA: We had a lot of fun doing that, you know, people would look forward to us, they'd come out of their offices, and then everybody would sing and, so that was one event that we had and we had a number of other events as well. Faculty association was fairly active, and these [inaudible] barbecues [inaudible] and that kind of stuff. Unfortunately, the place is so big that they're not doing that anymore and it's lost that, and again that's part of the growth whether you agree with it or not, that's what it is. But yes, those were some – and the other outstanding thing quite frankly - from our own personal perspective of the travel program was that we used to take our students every year on a trip somewhere. That was part of the training. It was optional; it wasn't a credit - it is now. I think they gain some credits for doing it, but I suppose we probably did it because we were so respected within the industry – we were the leading program in the country bar none, as far as the training of travel consultants was concerned and we have the paperwork to prove it. [pen tapping on the table] But we used to take them on trips. We traveled all over the world, you know, I remember, on one occasion, Ron Campbell, that I was telling you about, they had their graduation ceremonies. They did it in – because we always went at the end of the year – in Jamaica and the diplomas were done on banana leaves [laughter], and another time they did a cruise– a Mexico cruise – and the captain presented the diplomas, and we did trips to the Orient. The last one I went on –

no, it was not, it was the second or third last one – we took a group to Turkey, we had planned on going to Egypt, and then they started killing tourists in Luxor. So, we quickly changed and moved to Turkey, so we did a comprehensive fourteen-day tour of Turkey. I think our airfare at that, to give you some idea of the discounts we got from the industry. I think the kids – I only call them kids because that's what they were compared to me – I think we may be paid \$399 for airfare and you know, we had really good discounts on our land arrangements and those kinds of things because the people who hosted us other the country or local tourist organisations felt it was in their interest to host us because they were certainly - they knew our record that it was potentially good for them that they had people who were personally knowledgeable about their country or their area or their hotel or whatever and became sales people for them. So, it was in their interest to look after us. So those were highlights. We went somewhere every year, and the bulk of what we did was Hawaii because that was a primary destination from here, no question, and I had been involved with Hawaii for many, many years. I was Director travel services for the Alberta Motor Association. We used to run packages over there all the time, so I knew my way around Hawaii. We used to do hotel inspections; everybody went in the hotels, they had their inspection sheets, they checked the sheets, they checked the linen, they checked, everything – just, front office, the whole thing – so when they came back they had a portfolio of that destination [pen clicking] that they could use on their day to day sales features when they were in an agency. So those were highlights, the trips, singing, Foundation with its Mad Hatter's ball and the other things the Foundation was involved with and well that's three.

VM: Yeah. When you look back on your career at the community college, what are some of your proudest achievements?

PA: Recognition by the students was pretty proud. You know I received a student's achievement award a couple of times. The fact that I was a MacEwan medallion winner in 1998 was a real honour; unfortunately, although Dr. MacEwan was alive, he didn't present it because he wasn't well enough, I got it from Heather which was equally important. So that was a highlight, and being able to represent the college in various organisations around town was pretty important too. To know that and to be a part of that. And to know that you and the institution were, in fact, a part of the community –

VM: Yes.

PA: Because that's what we were.

VM: So, the last question I have for you, is there something I have failed to ask you that you'd like to share, but I haven't given you the chance to do so?

PA: No, I don't think so. I think it's great that you're doing this. I'm glad I was able to participate I hope you're getting some good success –

VM: Yes.

PA: With the numbers, because it's important that you do, I think. I think it's important to understand that while it is no longer a community college, it still is in the community. And it's now maybe a community university, but I would just hope that academia – and I say this with no disrespect – because they have their role, I just hope that they understand the importance of what we all contribute to this institution. I guess one of the

most difficult parts that we had that I experienced and went through as a non-academic was the fact that when I originally joined here, we had a single-salary grid. Then they split it into multi-grids – I don't know what it is now - a dozen maybe across now with so many steps down on each one.

VM: What year was that? Do you remember what year –

PA: Well, it was probably, we were at the west end campus, so it must've been maybe 1980, maybe somewhere in that area. I don't remember specifically. They split it down, and those of us that were non-academic were at the bottom of the list with no opportunity to move up, even with increased service in teaching and recognition for your teaching capacity and abilities and that caused a number of us who were non-academics – again with no disrespect to the academics – considerable difficulty in getting along, because we were treated as – I felt anyway as far as the compensation was concerned, and that's part of the institution – as not able to reach the top. I think that's probably still the situation. And –

VM: It starts to -

PA: And that's unfortunate –

VM: It starts to build that divide, right? Between –

PA: Yes, there is still that divide which is unfortunate, and I used to get into – and I respect, and I like the guy, I really do, Dolf Ryks, I don't know if that name is familiar, he was in the - he was Arts and Science - academic Dr. Dolf Ryks, just a great guy, outdoorsman, build canoes, always donated in the Foundation for auction, you know

that kind of stuff – but we got into violent disagreements about – because he had a Ph.D. and I did not -

VM: Right.

PA: And I used to say to him, hey Dolf I'm just as good in the classroom as you are any day [coughing], but it didn't change, we did get some recognition over a period of years of professional designations, our certified travel counsel designations, and cruise counsel designations, but we still were not able to reach the top. And an interesting anecdote is that at one point, we were between [sorry, I have to take a drink of water] deans, I guess, of the business division and – I can't remember who had left, somebody left, anyway – and they were interviewing for a new dean. They were looking for someone who could run the business division [pen clicking]. We were downtown campus at that point, Seventh Street. So, they were looking for interim deans to until they found somebody and I was asked if I would apply to become an – I guess they call them acting dean or whatever –

VM: Yes.

PA: And it was Chuck Day he and I are good friends – and so I went up and interviewed with him, and I said, I've a question for you Chuck, I said, you've asked me so obviously you have a certain amount of confidence in me, and this was the whole academic non-academic coming out that I could do the job and he said, yah, and I said, well let me ask you a question, you're interviewing for dean now, I said if I apply to become the permanent dean would I be considered, and he said, no, and I said, why, because I

don't have the academic qualifications but yet you think I'm adequate, that's it I'm not applying –

VM: Yes.

PA: So that's just the way it went, and that's when Paul Byrne came on, Paul Byrne got the job and – no it wasn't Paul Byrne, it was Tom Collier I don't know if that name rings a bell –

VM: No.

PA: Tom was dean of the business division for a number of years. He's still around town. I haven't seen Tom. I've tried to reach him a couple of times, but he's not responding for whatever reason. But Paul Byrne came in as president at that time. He came back from Mohawk College in Ontario, and I keep in touch with Paul and also with Gerry Kelly. Great guys, and we discuss travel quite a bit; they rely on my advice [pen clicking] for cruising, although I'm all out of that now. Still, it's nice to keep in touch with them –

VM: Yes.

PA: So, that's sort of a bit of what's going on.

VM: Well, I'd like to thank you very much for your time and sharing all your answers to the questions, your insights, absolutely invaluable. So, thank you.

PA: I appreciate it. I look forward seeing the end result of this thing and –

VM: Me too. [laughter]

PA: I'm glad that you're doing it. I'm glad that you're getting a good response, you say you are, and that's great, and I'll do what I can to encourage – if it comes up in a conversation for participation - if that helps. That would be something I could help with.

VM: Thank you. Thank you very much.

PA: And if you need me for anything else, you know where I am.

VM: I do.

[End of interview]

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