Narrator: Dr. Berhardt Blumenthal

Interviewer: Derek Casey

Date of Interview: April 4, 2007

Location: Dr. Blumenthal's office, 2nd floor, Olney Hall, La Salle University, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Topic: The purpose and topic of this interview was to sit down with Dr. Blumenthal and conduct an oral history of his life and career as an academic, expert on German language and literature and to discuss how La Salle University has changed over the years and where it is going in the future. This interview deals with Dr. Blumenthal's formative years growing up in Philadelphia and his academic life which took him first to La Salle as an undergraduate and later to Northwestern University for his master's degree and his Ph.D. at Princeton University. In addition the interview focuses on how the foreign language programs have developed, been shaped by world events and where Dr. Blumenthal envision it going in the future and what influence he has had on the department.

Time Stamp: Topic:

00:55 Opening remarks. Dr. Blumenthal discusses the places he has lived in Philadelphia, New Jersey, Illinois and Germany.

02:00 Dr. Blumenthal discusses his parents background. Father was a men's clothing cutter in Philadelphia for 25 years until he attended Temple University and later worked
As a television repair man. His mother was a Housewife. His parents did not approve of his Choice to become an academic.

02:25 Dr. Blumenthal attended La Salle High School which was His first exposure to the Christian Brothers. He states that Felt La Salle High School was good and thought of the College as the next reasonable step.

03:31 Discussion of early interest in German philosophers Began with Hegel and Kant among others which deeply Interested Dr. Blumenthal. From there he began to Study German linguistics.

04:20 Dr. Blumenthal states that when he was at La Salle as an Undergraduate from 1951 to 1955 all the teachers were Christian Brothers.

06:10 Dr. Blumenthal recalls his most influential professors at La Salle. Tom McCarthy; Bob McDonough; Gene Fitzgerald; Charles Kelly

07:30 When asked if the German language education he received At La Salle College was a quality one, Dr. Blumenthal States that it was and it prepared him for studies in Graduate school.

08:30 Dr. Blumenthal’s briefly discusses his dissertation topic for Ph.D. at Princeton University. He decided up this topic Studying expressionist poets in Germany. *Else Lasker-Schüler* (1869-1945)
When asked what the major differences are between Master's and doctoral level work Dr. Blumenthal states that at the doctorate level a bit more sophistication is required. On average a master's thesis runs between 35-50 pages while a doctoral dissertation will run 160 to 200 pages.

When asked how he began his teaching career at La Salle Dr. Blumenthal stated that the Foreign Language Department chair at the time called him and offered him the job while he was finishing up at Princeton in 1963.

When asked if he believes language is the key to understanding culture Dr. Blumenthal states that he does. As a bilingual person he states that when he thinks in German he can arrive at different conclusions when examining a problem as opposed to thinking in English. Perspectives change when thinking in another language.

I wanted to shift gears and ask Dr. Blumenthal about which Post-World War II German chancellor he most associates with German economic success. Dr. Blumenthal believes that Ludwig Ehrhardt who introduced the "economic Miracle" package to German economics in the 1950s. Dr. Blumenthal feels that Helmut Kohl was the most impressive post war chancellor.
17:30

In response to my questions regarding Germany’s future And the challenges that lie ahead for Germany Dr. Blumenthal feels that Germany is the dominant European industrial power and will remain so. But Germany is being squeezed and feels the Heat of the United States and Russia. Russian Oil is making Russia a more dominant power and Germany is feeling the heat of being between Russia And the United States.

19:00

When asked about faculty input in La Salle going co-

Educational the faculty were involved in the discussions And for the most part supported the idea.

20:10

When asked what he feels contributes to the fact that La Salle has been successful in sending students on to Doctoral work Dr. Blumenthal stated that in his program La Salle is ranked first in the area and that La Salle is a Great school. He also pointed to a picture of Fulbright Himself visiting La Salle due to the high number of Fulbright scholarships awarded to La Salle.

23:51

Dr. Blumenthal stated that he changed very little of the German program when he became Director in 1969. He Said some new courses were added in German language And philosophy.
As a poet who writes in German Dr. Blumenthal discusses His poetry and his experiences having them published in The United States and Germany. Dr. Blumenthal told me that he has not been to Germany in A few years and probably won't be back for a couple more Because he has been working on new undergraduate and Graduate courses. One of which is a security and Intelligence certificate program with a concentration in Eastern Europe. Thus it is an area studies program. When asked what the genesis for this sort of a program was Dr. Blumenthal stated that security and intelligence issues Are important enough to warrant a program to gear Students for work in the FBI, CIA, Foreign Service and Related program.

Dr. Blumenthal discussed the new Critical Languages Program which is related to the intelligence certification Program in that university training in Chinese, Russian and Farsi will also feed students into CIA, Foreign Service, etc. Dr. Blumenthal told me it took two years to put this Program together with many revisions and reworking of The program. Dr. Blumenthal states that the current Global political situation calls for such a program.

Responding to the question of whether other universities
Trying to get information from La Salle he told me yes. A former student at a university in northern New Jersey came by when he was asked to begin such a program. He also noted that Neumann College and Mary Washington University in Maryland are developing such programs.

Dr. Blumenthal told me that he does not like to copy other schools and their programs. It was suggested that La Salle begin an Arabic studies program. Since Villanova has an Arabic studies program and many others schools and community colleges have Arabic Language programs he wanted to begin a Farsi program. According to Dr. Blumenthal only the University of Pennsylvania and Neumann College offer courses in Farsi.

Dr. Blumenthal stated that there is some collaboration between the Foreign Languages Department and other departments. Dr. Blumenthal stated he would like to get Dr. Barbara Allen involved in his new programs and would like is working on a Ph.D. program in comparative European cultures doctorate in which he would like to work with Dr. George Stow.

When asked about his teaching philosophy he believes in shaping people in his image, as Goethe once said.
Dr. Blumenthal stated that teaching is a way to tell others about his passion. He loves German literature and teaching is a medium to express that passion. His advice for a new teacher is to “take it easy.”