

Spring 2015

## Interview of Michael R. Smith

Michael R. Smith  
*La Salle University*

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## Field Notes

**Interviewee:** Michael R. Smith '82

**Interviewer:** Bradford James Morith

**Interview Date:** February 8, 2015 (midday)

**Interview Location:** Conference Room 312, Student Union, La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Field notes written on February 10, 2015

### **The Interviewee:**

Michael R. Smith is an alumnus of La Salle University, Class of 1982, with a degree in accounting. He was born in 1960 at Nazareth Hospital in the Greater Northeast section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He grew up along the Roosevelt Boulevard of Northeast Philadelphia in the Holmes Circle neighborhood. He attended and graduated from Father Judge Catholic High School in Philadelphia in 1978. He decided upon La Salle University and attended La Salle as an accounting major from 1978 to 1982, the latter being his graduation year. Legacy wise, Michael is one of many La Salle graduates in his family, including his father, sister, brother, two uncles, and two cousins. His sister also taught at La Salle University, as well, and she encouraged Michael to attend here especially. Michael commuted to the La Salle campus and was part of the commuter culture at the school, especially with other students from Northeast Philadelphia. Michael participated in intramural swimming and water polo on campus, and he played a lot of pinochle with his campus friends. Academically, his favorite professor was Pete Sweeney in accounting, who taught Michael principled conservative accounting, as well as professional ethics. Michael also did a quasi-internship while at La Salle at Kay Automotive in Philadelphia, where he worked as an accountant. This was his first full-time career job upon graduation. Michael has since gone on to careers in financial and business management, and he applauds the strong La Salle accounting network for alumni throughout the country. Today, he is the father of a 19-year-old daughter at Bloomsburg University, and he lives vicariously through her, encouraging her to take advantage of aspects of college life that he neglected while an undergraduate. Michael currently resides in Morrisville, Pennsylvania.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Bradford James Morith, was born in 1975, and I grew up in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, and Yardley, Pennsylvania. My family, on the maternal side, is also native to the Delaware Valley and northeastern Maryland going back to Pennsylvania Colony. I am a graduate of Marlboro College (2004), with a bachelor of arts in music and a minor in German. For my bachelor's degree, I wrote a senior thesis on the classical style of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in context of the European Enlightenment. I have a master's degree in secondary

education, as well, having received this degree from Springfield College in 2007. I taught, and tutored, social studies for over five years, and I worked briefly as a non-profit executive, as well. Currently, I am a master's degree in history candidate at La Salle University, and I reside in Philadelphia.

### **Background:**

Michael and I are close friends, and we engage in volunteer work together. I knew that he would be a solid choice to interview not only because he is a La Salle graduate, but also because he is very reliable and responsible about his commitments. We have been friends now for about a year, and he has a deep passion for men's college basketball, especially La Salle Explorer men's basketball. I enjoy talking to him about the history of the team, and we attended one game together in January, as the Explorers took on conference rival George Washington Colonials. Michael was my first choice for the practice interview, and he responded immediately to my text message to affirm this interview. I thought this would be a great opportunity for me to hear more of his story, and now, I also have permission to submit his interview to the La Salle online archives.

After confirming the interview via text message, we met on Thursday, January 29, 2015, to schedule a date and time for the interview. We set to meet for the interview on Sunday, February 8, 2015, at 10 am. On January 29<sup>th</sup>, I also informed him to think of possible topics to focus on for the interview. At first, he was reluctant to talk about his La Salle experience, but I encouraged him to contemplate this topic over the coming week.

On Thursday, February 5, 2015, we met again and set the following topics for interview: a. his La Salle experience and b. the aspects of his college career that he wishes he could have done over. I noticed that he was now comfortable about discussing his La Salle experience, and that made me pleased. Also, upon encouragement by Dr. Barbara Allen, I secured his permission to place his interview in the La Salle archives for future researchers.

On Sunday, February 8, 2015, Michael picked me up at my Philadelphia apartment, and we then drove to the La Salle campus for the interview. I informed Michael that the interview was somewhere between lengthy monologue and curt answers. I wanted to reassure him to feel free to talk at length for each question and to discuss aspects of his life that he found most significant. Also, we discussed topics not to be discussed in the interview, and for sake of privacy and decorum, I wish not to disclose those. I did reassure Michael that I would not mention those topics.

### **Description of the Interview:**

After parking in the student parking lot, Michael and I went to the La Salle student union to conduct the interview. This was Sunday, February 8, 2015, at about 10:15 a.m. Michael seemed slightly anxious and excited about the interview, as I can tell he enjoys talking about La Salle University. The student union was a great choice for the interview on a Sunday morning

due to its quiet. We went to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor conference room area, and we settled in Conference Room 312, which I had reserved two days previous in the Campus Affairs office.

I set up one of the tables, with two chairs, on the wall near the electric socket. I decided to record with both an Olympus digital voice recorder (battery operated) and my iPhone 5c 'Voice Memo' function. I plugged in my iPhone and set up both recorders several inches apart on the table. Michael completed, and signed, the deed of gift form in order to authorize placement of the interview in the La Salle archives.

Both voice recorders worked great for the interview, but I wanted to see which one was better. I also wanted to record with a back up, as to ensure a failsafe recording in case one recorder did not work. The room was generally silent, but the recorders did pick up faint yelling outside from the lacrosse players in the athletic field. However, these distant yells were inconsequential to the sound recording quality.

Before I began the interview, I did a brief sound check with both recorders on the table, and both recorders worked fine. I then proceeded with the interview. The room was quiet throughout, with the exception of the faint inconsequential yells in the athletic field.

I gave a brief introduction of myself, Michael, and the date at the start of the recording and asked Michael if I had permission to record. We proceeded and I used an excellent pre-typed question sheet, with a set of topical questions in predetermined order. As the interview proceeded, I checked off completed questions with a highlighter, not a pen, to make as little sound as possible.

Michael gave excellent analysis and anecdotes about his La Salle experiences. The best anecdotes and analysis came from his discussion of spectating at a La Salle men's basketball game in 1969, his talk of his favorite professors, and most strongly, the La Salle influence on his current relationship with his college-bound daughter.

Two sound recording corruptions took place during the interview. I giggled quite a bit. I related to parts of my friend's story, but on the recording, it sounds like I am being condescending. This is something to improve upon in the future. Michael also tapped and brushed his hand on the table quite a bit, as conversational gesturing. These came up as mild thumps in the recording. I thought about asking him to stop this mid interview, but I was worried it would upset the flow of his discourse. I think in the future I will inform an interviewee of this potential problem beforehand.

All in all, I was pleased with the interview. I felt I asked some intelligent two-part questions, and I listened rather well. At times, my questioning technique was jolty, but otherwise, I felt it was solid. After the interview, I treated Michael to Starbucks to thank him.

**Note on the Recording:**

For the recording, I used both an Olympus digital voice recorder on battery power and an iPhone 5c 'Voice Memo' recorder. I did not use any additional microphones. After the interview, I downloaded the interview from the Olympus digital recorder onto my laptop and USB drive. The recording came out in Windows Media Audio file format, and it played back without issue on my laptop. I downloaded this recording onto Canvas, and it plays well on that online program, as well. To create the transcript excerpts, I used the Windows Media player on my laptop, which can be adjusted to play back at 0.6 speed, which I found best for transcription. I also used the recording on my iPhone to help prepare the field notes.

**Editing the Transcript:**

My editing decisions included:

1. eliminating repeated words and most false starts
2. placing information about unintelligible sounds (empty brackets) and laughter in brackets
3. placing time stamps at or near the top of each page
4. placing a time stamp at the end of the recording
5. using dashes to indicate incomplete sentences and phrases
6. using dashes to show sentences and phrases that were interrupted
7. using *italics* to indicate emphasis
8. using quotation marks to indicate reported speech
9. editing out unnecessary feedback words (crutch words, guggles)