

Steven Gilligan  
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Dr. Barbara C. Allen  
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### Oral History Interpretive Analysis of Professor Edward Turzanski

This oral history interpretation examines the overarching purposes and goals of the project assigned for History 650, the processes and methodology of this oral history, including the rationale for choosing the narrator, preparation and research methods, an analysis of the interview and its process, and an analysis of the narrator and his relationship with LaSalle.

The purpose of this project was to test the methods and approaches of oral history through a case study of current and former LaSallians. Our class examined texts written by prominent scholars in the field of oral history, including Paul Thompson, Donald Ritchie, Valerie Yow and Michael Frisch, among others, to study the process of and to produce an oral history that would contribute to preserving the history of LaSalle University. The class focused on the benefits, methods and best practices of oral history and guidelines for transcribing oral histories for archival preservation. Our narrators were chosen from a list of current and former LaSallians submitted by the university archivist, Brother Joseph Grabenstein, for their particular contributions to LaSalle with an appreciation for the importance of creating a record of these contributions for a larger project surrounding the commemoration of LaSalle's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2013.

The narrator of this oral history, Professor Edward Turzanski, was selected because he attended LaSalle as an undergraduate, entered a profession and then returned to LaSalle as a professor and administrator. I sought to discover what it was about LaSalle that drew him back

to the University. Through his extensive media work, Professor Turzanski also presents an outward face of LaSalle to the public. As a graduate student, a teacher of U.S. American Government and Politics, and an active participant in the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, I have had the opportunity to meet with Professor Turzanski and have a deep interest in the topics on which he is considered an expert. I sought to discover the characteristics of Professor Turzanski and LaSalle that initially brought him to the University, the reasons for his return, and the state of LaSalle's relationship with the surrounding community. In terms of his experiences leading up to and his attendance at LaSalle and his work as a professor and administrator for the University, the narrator was mostly open and forthright. However, he was careful and selective about what he was willing to share concerning his personal biography. These are among the items discussed in the analysis of the project.

The preparation of this oral history began with conceptualizing the purpose of the project. Valerie Yow suggests that the interviewer ask at the start "What do I want to find out?"<sup>1</sup> Since the record of Professor Turzanski's experiences as a LaSalle alumnus and employee for the archives was the purpose of the project, I focused my research and prepared my interview guide with what Brother Joseph Grabenstein later characterized in the class as "common sense." I sought not to push too hard to find out what might make for interesting reading but might have been damaging to the career of the narrator and perhaps counter-productive to the overarching goal of the project, a point of view supported by several of the course readings. Instead, the interview focused on capturing the narrator's personal experiences and his feelings towards LaSalle as an institution in terms of its particular educational mission. In my interpretation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Yow, Valerie Ralieg. *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2005.), 69.

interview, I will examine some of the themes of Professor Turzanski as a narrator.

Donald Ritchie suggests that when interviewing politicians, lawyers and other professionals who might be familiar with being around microphones, the interviewer prepare probing questions to avoid “superficial and packaged” responses.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it was important that the preparatory research be comprehensive and detailed. An appointment with Brother Grabenstein began the process of research collection. There, he provided a substantial amount of material that directed my research, including the faculty positions Professor Turzanski accepted at the university and some information about his work for the university. In addition to the university archives, I utilized the online archives of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* which contained about a dozen articles dating back to 1999 in which the narrator was either the subject or was cited in some fashion. Continuing on the internet, I searched his name on LaSalle’s and other internet search engines. On the internet I found, among other information, that Professor Turzanski is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (F.R.P.I.). I also viewed Professor Turzanski on the news analysis television program *Inside Story*, which airs each Sunday morning on the local ABC affiliate. Finally, I conducted brief interviews with two of Professor Turzanski’s colleagues at the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, Margaret Lonsetta, Vice President for Education, and Alan Cini, Director of Student Programs. Clearly, having a good deal of research completed and obtaining a fair amount of information are critical for developing an interview guide and conducting a successful interview.

Several pieces of information stood out from my research and formed the structure of the interview guide. First, the lack of biographical data required that I structure the interview to

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<sup>2</sup>. Ritchie, Donald A., *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003.), 101.

include several questions about Professor Turzanski's life in Philadelphia both before becoming a student and before returning as a member of the faculty. Second, in keeping with LaSalle's mission of providing education, I wanted to record the relationship that LaSalle has with the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia and its educational programs for high school and middle school students. Third, the bulk of the articles obtained from the university archives concerned the process that the university took in attempting to close 20<sup>th</sup> Street. The information I obtained indicated that it was a long and drawn out legal conflict that involved significant protests and intense political intrigue. It seemed odd to me, as someone relatively new to LaSalle, that so much conflict could surround the simple closure of a street for safety reasons. Fourth, I discovered in an announcement in LaSalle's *Alumni Association News* (Winter 1984-1985) that Professor Turzanski worked as a congressional aid for U.S. Representative Robert A. Borski. It seemed appropriate to include his experiences working in this capacity. Fifth, I learned from my interviews with members of the World Affairs Council that Professor Turzanski also worked for the CIA but they did not know the nature of the work he completed or what positions he held. Thus, I included several questions on this topic in my interview guide. Finally, the discovery that Professor Turzanski holds a position as Senior Fellow at F.P.R.I. led me to ask several questions about his background in intelligence analysis and his work in the media.

In addition to the information gained in my research, I also wished to examine several other lines of questions with Professor Turzanski concerning the history and mission of LaSalle as an institution. I wanted to learn what originally drew him to LaSalle, what he experienced as an undergraduate student, especially in his classes and student life, and if any professors or mentors affected his experience. I also wanted to know how he felt changes, such as events like

when women were admitted as full time students or when students protested during the Vietnam War might have changed LaSalle. Finally, I created several questions about recent changes at LaSalle, including the decline of the numbers of Christian Brothers, and about how he views LaSalle's continuing mission.

With all my research complete, I developed thirty-eight questions for my interview guide. The guide contained open ended and non-leading questions. The questions were set up in chronological order, as recommended by Ritchie biographies, because it assists narrators in reconstructing the past in a rational order and naturally leads them to reconstruct accurate memories.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the chronology of the questions, I developed the interview guide using a variety of question types. Yow suggests that it is important to prepare several types of questions, some of which I included in this interview. They are: "probing", "follow-up", "clarification", "reason-why?", and "comparison".<sup>4</sup> The following are examples of the types of questions I asked and what was learned from these questions. The first question in the interview was a clarification question in which I asked the narrator what he meant when he used the expression "row home Philadelphia" in a speech. I expected the answer to this question would concern his youth and upbringing in Philadelphia. It led expectantly to the natural follow-up question, "How did your upbringing in row home Philadelphia lead you to LaSalle?" This clarification question, followed by a logical and natural follow-up, led to an excellent and detailed response that captured one of the major themes of the interview: that LaSalle has provided substantial access to higher education for Philadelphia's working class. I asked a

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<sup>3</sup> Ritchie, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Yow, 102.

probing question when discussing the 20<sup>th</sup> Street Project. Professor Turzanski mentioned that in the future the neighbors might prefer for the street to be closed. This seemed strange, considering that the street closing was so controversial to the neighborhood. I asked him, "How would it [closing 20<sup>th</sup> Street] be to their advantage?" This led to an interesting and specific response that included traffic patterns, thru way, congestion, and safety that were used in the arguments to City Council. I asked reason-why questions as well, such as "What brought you back to LaSalle?" The closest I came to asking a challenge question was when I asked him if he could elaborate on the reason why he earned the medals he had in his office. Yow discusses how to cope with troublesome situations. She describes that by following verbal and non-verbal cues of the narrator, the interviewer can ascertain that he or she is uncomfortable with a line of questioning. She suggests coming back to that topic at a later date, phrasing the question in a different way. In this case, instead of mentioning the medals he received and waiting for his customary elaboration, I specifically asked him what he could tell me about how he earned these commendations.<sup>5</sup> However, Professor Turzanski again declined to elaborate on this topic. I did not think it proper to continue this line of questioning. In the end I found that many of my most meaningful questions were unscripted follow-up questions that reacted to something he had said. Again, in responding to the questions on the 20<sup>th</sup> Street Project, Professor Turzanski mentioned how a full closure might someday be seen as advantageous to the neighborhood. I followed up with a question concerning the current relationship between LaSalle and the immediate neighborhood. By developing a comprehensive interview guide with a variety of questions, I was able to conduct an informed and informative interview of Professor Turzanski.

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<sup>5</sup>. Yow, 108.

The interview was scheduled for two afternoon meetings in Professor Turzanski's office on April 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. The first interview lasted approximately 55 minutes with 40:01 minutes recorded. The second interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes with 71:45 minutes recorded. One reason why the interview time is significantly longer than the recording time lies in that Professor Turzanski indicated that I pause the recording when he answered his phone or met with another guest who came to his door. It clearly would have been preferable to avoid these interruptions, but his office was the most convenient location for him to meet for the interview. In spite of the difficulties inherent in having the interview in his place of business, the office offered some important visual cues for the interview, as suggested by Ritchie.<sup>6</sup> After Professor Turzanski responded to biographical questions and his experiences as an undergraduate, I asked him several questions based upon what I saw in the room. He has several plaques denoting his affiliation with the CIA, FBI and the offices of the President and Vice President of the United States. He also has several pictures of himself with former presidents and other political leaders. In addition to the political and professional artifacts, there are several items of sports memorabilia, representing all of the major Philadelphia teams (and the New York Giants). I had planned to use, and did use, several articles from student news sources to help him remember LaSalle from ten years ago, but the artifacts in his office elicited more detailed explanations.

During the interview, I was mindful of several important concepts that were derived from our readings, particularly from Valerie Yow. She cited that it is important to include an introduction of the project in an interview, connections among topics, encouragement, both

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<sup>6</sup> Ritchie, 91.

verbal and non-verbal, and active listening.<sup>7</sup> Each of these is helpful in building a rapport with the narrator, thereby making him more comfortable and open to the interview questions.

Introducing the project for the narrator and confirming permission to record clarify the purpose of the interview while guaranteeing that the narrator understands the project and its requirements. Explaining the connections between topics shows the narrator that what he said was relevant and valuable and how it leads to the next question. Throughout the interview, I was conscious of giving encouragement to the narrator by thanking him and including comments such as “really?” and “wow.” However, to avoid appearing disingenuous or clouding the recording with too many comments, I tried to minimize my verbal encouragement and focused on smiling, nodding and maintaining eye contact. All of these actively build rapport with the narrator since they are acts of basic courtesy that make for a good listener.

After concluding the interview, I rated myself using Yow’s Checklist for Critiquing Interviewing Skills.<sup>8</sup> Being cognizant of the checklist beforehand was helpful, but I still made some errors. I made sure that I met the positive criteria on the checklist, such as indicating empathy, showing appreciation, explaining the reasons for a change in topic, and requesting clarification when needed. These sensible measures were addressed previously in this interpretation. However, I stumbled when I asked a long, thematic question about changes that LaSalle had experienced as an institution. Instead, I should have broken the question up so Professor Turzanski could have answered each part individually. In the end, it did not greatly affect the results of the interview because he recalled and addressed most of the parts of the

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<sup>7</sup>. Yow, 92-99.

<sup>8</sup>. Yow, 115.



question. I also stumbled with the category of making irrelevant or distracting comments. It was not the comments I made that were distracting, but rather it was a cough. Even though I took preventative measures, I was not able to completely repress coughing, especially in the second interview. In the end, I assess myself with a score between 80 and 90 on Yow's scale.

In interpreting the interview itself, I found four major strings or themes of the narrator: being working class, being proud of LaSalle's connection to the community, being influenced by mentors, and being an administrator. Right from the beginning of the interview, Professor Turzanski described himself as being from working class, row home Philadelphia. He grew up as the child of two Polish immigrants at a time when "you worked outside of the home at a young age." He mentioned that he and "a lot of kids like me had to pay their own way" through both high school and college. Interestingly, to him this is what made LaSalle a terrific fit. He saw himself as an impoverished kid from Port Richmond who had to struggle to grow larger than his neighborhood. Later in the interview, he also described LaSalle as a place that allows you to "fight above your weight," an affirmation he also extended to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia. He described that "St. LaSalle put pens in the hands of the sons and daughters of the plow sharemen" and that it was "the animating ethos of his faith that makes him the patron saint of Catholic education." When Professor Turzanski discussed the working class background of many LaSalle faculty and alumni, he said that he was proud that 40% of the current student body is the first in their family to attend college. He revisited these themes throughout the interview and stated adamantly that working class is "who I am. I am proud of it."

Professor Turzanski viewed his working class identity as something "very representative of LaSalle" and its mission to "vigorously go into the inner cities and reach people without

means to help improve themselves and raise subsequent generations.” To do this, he said, LaSalle sees itself as part of the neighborhood. This importance of the attachment to the community is evident throughout the interview. Professor Turzanski credited LaSalle’s connection with North Catholic High School as the reason why he attended LaSalle as an undergraduate. As a student at North Catholic, he took Russian with Father Raymond Fleck, who brought his classes to lectures by Professor George Perfesky at LaSalle to “give us a taste of college life.” He described that he and many kids like himself found themselves on a “lineal path” and credits the connection between North Catholic and the University for giving him “an inspiration as to what my next step ought to be.” This theme of connection with the community continued in his relationship with the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia. He fosters a close relationship with the World Affairs Council because it is also an organization that shares the mission of reaching out to the underprivileged and making education accessible. As a LaSalle administrator, he expressed pride in the work he has done for and with the Council, which includes lectures and offering facilities to Council programs. He stated that it is important to “position us as much as possible so that we can be part of successful activities and we can help others be successful.” He noted several other connections with the neighborhood and city throughout the interview, including how the 20<sup>th</sup> Street Project improved the neighborhood and its relationship with LaSalle and how the university is giving up property that currently serves as a practice field to make room for a supermarket. He said the neighborhood desperately needs a supermarket, and this decision is helpful to LaSalle as well because “our interest is the overall safety, economic health, and desirability of this neighborhood of which we are a part.” Finally, he described the measures taken by LaSalle to remain a member of the community. He noted

that “LaSalle subsidizes the cost [of tuition] for those who can’t” and that he was proud that a high percentage of LaSalle students are the first in their family to go to college. Most significantly, perhaps, was that LaSalle has chosen to remain an urban university and decided not to relocate outside the city. He stated that “the decision was made that we’re not going to leave because this is where we’re supposed to be, where we should be.” Clearly Professor Turzanski derives great satisfaction from LaSalle’s connection to the community.

Another string in Professor Turzanski’s oral history is the influence of his mentors and the opportunities they brought him. In fact, he noted that he strives to duplicate the experiences that he had with faculty with his current students. He mentioned several professors who made great impressions on him, including C. Richard Cleary, who he described as a mentor and who talked him out of dropping out of college when money was tight for his family, and Joe Brogan, “one of the most brilliant men I had the pleasure of learning from.” Professor Turzanski recalled the personal attention he had from professors, which made a difference for him. He has tried to embrace this attention as a faculty member, following the example of his Russian professor, George Prefesky, who made a young Ed Turzanski feel that he was “not only special to him, but special, period.” He shared that he was so enthralled by his teachers that he and his friends would discuss not only sports but also “what happened in Brogan’s class.” In fact, he related on more than one occasion that this is an important mission of LaSalle. Later in the interview, he described his classroom as a “port in the storm” where “nothing can touch you. . . and what you do here determines your capability to fix what’s wrong with the outside.” He strongly identified with LaSalle’s mission, and that of his past professors, of being accessible, helpful and encouraging, while at the same time offering a rigorous education. Without having the means to

interview his students to find if he was successful in this, I took the opportunity to seek out non-scientific and purely anecdotal evidence of his assertions. I logged on to ratemyprofessor.com and found that all of the comments from his former students substantiate, to a degree, the goals he described. The entries include comments like “challenging,” “helpful,” and “truly cares about his students.” Clearly this source cannot be taken as legitimate, but it does give some anecdotal evidence about the importance of LaSalle’s mentors in Professor Turzanski’s own work.

Finally, the last theme that emerges in this interview is Professor Turzanski’s current role as an administrator for the university. Professor Turzanski’s awareness of the purpose of this recording seemed to influence the majority of his answers. He related a consistently positive tone that clearly came from his heart, yet also portrayed LaSalle in a favorable light. He assumed a particularly administrative tone when he discussed topics like the 20<sup>th</sup> Street Project, LaSalle’s relationship to the surrounding neighborhood, and the challenges LaSalle faces. Specifically, he was wary of discussing his wishes that LaSalle students were more open to a fair and honest exchange of political views. Shortly after expressing this wish, he said “I am not sure how widely these comments are going to be disseminated.” The remainder of the discussion of this topic focused on his belief that higher education *in general* faces this problem rather than LaSalle *specifically*. In his role as an administrator, Professor Turzanski appeared hesitant to speak at length about any limitations of LaSalle. But this hesitance was somewhat expected, and perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect a current administrator who enjoys his work and takes such pride in his institution to discuss its limitations or drawbacks. It is also possible he would offer more in-depth responses if he were unhappy with his job or closer to the end of his career.

Oral history is a relatively new field of study, one with which many historians are still

uncomfortable. Clearly, though, the value of documenting a narrator's story in his or her own words is tremendous. Who else can describe an experience better than the person who has lived through it? Due to its inherent subjectivity, oral history is not likely to eclipse quantitative written documentation in importance. However, in terms of this project, Professor Edward Turzanski's interview recorded and transcribed here for LaSalle's archives can be a valuable piece of a larger project that captures the history and spirit of this vibrant institution.