

**Rebecca McCannell, Department of Art
Western Oregon University**



Oral History 408

Interview with Professor of Art Rebecca McCannell

Interviewers: Matthew Capellen, Carlos Guerrero, Jorin
Hollenbeak.

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Matthew: This Oral History 408 David Doellinger's class on the 25th of April and [chuckle] Campbell Hall 312. This is Rebecca McCannell Art Professor. How are you doing this fine wonderful day?

McCannell: Good. Thank You.

Matthew: Awesome Ok so you have seen the list of questions and so we will go right ahead. Ok uh When did you start working at Western?

McCannell: I came in the fall of 1995 and I was straight out of graduate school so I was still in classes when I saw the job listing and I was at Northern Illinois University and so I saw they needed a printmaking professor and someone to teach drawing and those are my two favorite areas. I applied for the job and they flew me out for the interview that January before I graduated and by about March or April they had made their decision and they offered me this job so it was sort of a joke because I was getting M.F.A [Masters in Fine Arts] in art which is a really m well there are a lot of M.F.A's out there--people getting their degrees and very few positions open to teach at a university, so my advisor started joking that I was the *one* who got a job because there were so many others that were just, you know, just ending up piecing together positions or working odd jobs, so I felt really fortunate to have something lined up before I actually had my diploma.

Matthew: What were the circumstances that led you to come to work at Western?

McCannell: Ok yeah so, well I guess, going back farther than graduate school. Is that what you mean? You know coming here, I saw the job listing, but what lead me to this field, when I was an undergrad, I thought I was going to be an illustrator going to an art school in Grand Rapids, Michigan and that I was thinking I would go into either painting or drawing-- like magazine illustrations or book covers--things like that--but as I was taking more classes, I ended up doing some oral presentations and the professor had said "did you ever consider teaching?" she said I was explaining that process very clearly and, at that point, I hadn't really thought seriously about teaching, but I do come from a family of teachers, so it's familiar to me, so when

I got accepted into graduate school, in order to pay tuition, they offered you teaching assistantship sometimes. I was teaching a beginning drawing class. I thought that was..., it felt really fulfilling, so I decided to continue on with the idea of becoming a college professor rather than a professional artist.

Matthew: Ok So side question besides that. Did you double major or was it just...

McCannell: In graduate School?

Matthew: Yes

McCannell: I was just a Bachelor in Fine Arts for undergrad then for my Master's Degree, it was a Masters of Fine Arts. It was really just that one degree and I didn't have to double major. I had, in undergrad I had a printmaking major and a drawing minor so I did have kind of a little bit of both but for graduate school it was considered a single degree.

Matthew: Besides being a professor Have you ever had different positions?

McCannell: At the university? No I just had the same--so I came in as an assistant professor and then after about five years, you go through the promotion and tenure process and have to submit a big file of all your community service and student reviews and professional exhibitions that I have been in and I was promoted to associate. And then another five years later, I applied for full professor. I have kind of gone up the ranks but I have always been an Art Professor so I never been division chair or in an administrative position.

Carlos: For my que of questions. What is the basis for your job at Western?

McCannell: Ok so my primary position is to teach. So, I teach all the printmaking classes. You just have... in the Art Department you have one specialist per discipline, so we have one ceramics teacher, one sculpture teacher, one painter...and there are some adjuncts you have to fill out some of those areas...but in printmaking, I am the only one teaching those courses and then

in addition to the printmaking program I teach, Beginning drawing, A little bit further back I would teach life drawing too, where you have the live models and learn how to draw proportions and things like that. So, the drawing part, teaching drawing and printmaking m, currently I am head department as well. So that's a position that gets rotated around the art faculty m so I'm head of the department. This is my third year and I will probably renew for another three years if nobody else wants to take the job. It is not anything you get more pay for you do get course reassignment over the course of the year so you have a little bit lighter teaching load to make up for extra advising and hiring the department head has to do.

Carlos: I think that answered my next question which was What is a typical workday like for you?

McCannell: So like a typical day well the art classes are all a total of six hours a week. So, either 2 hours, 3 days a week. You guys taking any art classes or no? Ok [laughs] or sometimes they are three hours for two days a week. I am usually preparing for classes., part of is that there's a lot of supplies that I have to order. Special supplies that you can't just buy at the bookstore like copper plates, ferric etch, you know, acid to etch the plates away, or screen printing units or wooden blocks, things like that. Special carving tools and there is a lot of time in maintaining the equipment. We have the printing presses [imitates spinning a wheel with her hands] that they crank through and you know they print onto paper and so each term I teach a different type of printing. So, in between terms, we are kind of scrambling to reconfigure the print shop so ah we've got a big vertical etching tank where you know... and big trays are out on counters and then, another term, we are doing screen print so we put all that stuff away and then we pull out these racks with screen units and squeegees and things and the next term we will swap to wood carvings so the terms are pretty short so to get through the whole discipline of printmaking is kind of a rush, you know. There are just a lot of demos, because we're working really fast and so we burn through each term.

Yeah, so part of it is the teaching but also, I mean, the rest is a work day. So, I will have one class, as department head, each day, then the rest of the day I spend time answering emails from incoming students or someone needs to get a course substituted or we also deal with College of

ED [Education] to evaluate people who are trying to get into the M.A.T [Masters of Arts in Teaching] program to be art teachers in high schools. You have to kind of evaluate the right coursework to prepare them to teach. , sometimes we are dealing with community colleges to align our programs a little bit better so when students transfer here they don't have a lot of unused credits so there is all kind of miscellaneous...and then, , almost all the faculty end up on some kind of campus committee that deals with, , whatever topic might be...like a scholarship for here or it might be academic requirements or some kind of...*dry* subject usually [breaks into laughter].

Jorin: What is the most interesting experience you have had while on this campus?

McCannell: Yeah... when I heard that question I thought that I had a pretty boring existence here. I can't think of anything that's so amazingly interesting but there have been some things very memorable or just kind of fun memories there is one... at the end of each term we do a big cleanup of printmaking studio where the students get an individual job and they have to like scrub the sink or do other jobs one term the students decided to make breakfast there because it was an eight o'clock cleanup so they brought in eggs and bacon and all that stuff and we cleared off the hot plate in the studio. We kind of scrubbed it and cleaned it and they were frying eggs and bacon and things right on this big hot plate in the front of the studio. So that was kind of a funny memory. Another thing that is happening in this term that is interesting is one of my students is also a Vet from the Middle East and so he proposed to be in a collaboration project for they have printmaking so he paired up with a student who was a Vet – You're a vet? [Points at Jorin] I see on your computer or you've got pictures anyway – so but we're asking we got a group to pair up with one of our printmakers so it is a pretty small class uh we got twelve students and we got volunteers. Some of them are staff or faculty, some are students and each one meets with an artist and they kind of split off and tell the story and then so artist are taking notes about those experiences and are going to make prints and exhibit them right around Memorial Day so there is going to be a Veterans Banquet on the Tuesday right after Memorial Day. We are going to have an art exhibit down there in the Pacific room that kind of helps visually tell those experiences they issue and so that's it's the first year we are trying it I am not

sure how it is going to work out. But it's an exciting opportunity to work with a group that we don't always get to hear from.

Matthew: So, for question four. What are your plans and goals at western for now and also in the future?

McCannell: Yeah, So I have been here for 22 years and I really enjoy teaching, so I don't have any goals to move into administration. I don't really enjoy that part of having to hire and fire people and deal with a lot of, assessments stuff. I just really like being in the classroom with students and plan to teach... for as long as I have the energy to do it. Probably at least another, you know, another ten years. I've got kids that are still pretty young and so, I'll probably wait till they're older, or out of college, before I quit my job. But, yeah so, I'm pretty much trying to stay on the same path. I try to, get involved in some national exhibitions, and send my work out to professional shows. That professional aspect of my job m just kind of continues at the pace I am at, and I like the colleagues that I have and the students here are really great. A lot of times we are recruiting art majors from other departments. You know, they don't know...they come in an LACC [Liberal Arts Core Curriculum] class and they realize they are really good, and so often we recruit those students. It's really fun to see all the growth that happens in class.

Jorin: So, the Last one. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences here at Western?

McCannell: Well [pauses to think] No I, I feel I got a chance to say most of the things... [Long pause for thought] nothing is coming to mind right now.

[End of Transcript]