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Maureen Dolan Interview 2017

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WOU Interview Transcription: Christie Macavei

Conducted by: Dayna Ragasa, Zane Abrams, Christie Macavei, Nicholas Howes

Date: November 6, 2017

Maureen Dolan, Department of Sociology, Western Oregon University



MD: Maureen Dolan

DR: Dayna Ragasa

ZA: Zane Abrams

CM: Christie Macavei

NH: Nicholas Howes

[Question 1:]

Zane Abrams: We're good.

Dayna Ragasa: All right. All right, we are here with Dr. Dolan, and it is November 6th, 2017.

We are at Western Oregon University, and our names are Dayna Ragasa, Christie Macavei, Nick Howes - Howes? And Zane Abrams. All right, so, question one. When did you start working at Western?

Maureen Dolan: I've been here since 1993.

DR: What were the circumstances that led you to come to work here?

MD: Well, I applied for the job, in the Sociology Department, and this was also happened to be the part of the country where my family had relocated from Wisconsin and everyone. And so, I always tell the story that when I was looking, when I was job hunting after finishing my dissertation, I called my mom and I said, "Mom! Have you ever heard of this place called Monmouth?" [laughter] And she said, "Oh, that's twenty minutes from here." And that's my job. So I came also with—it was kind of family reunification as well as it seemed to me that Western was a really good fit for given my background what I wanted to do, and it's such a dynamic and interesting campus, and I wasn't disappointed.

DR: Have you had different positions here?

MD: Well, I came on a tenure track process, and so started off as assistant, then promoted to associate, then to full professor but in that particular process also I'm the co-chair of the Latin American studies program, chair, co-chair of Chicano studies, and I participate in gender studies program.

ZA: Was that the first one?

DR: Yes.

[Question 2:]

ZA: All right, for the second question. When did you start. Oh, I'm sorry. What is the basis for your job at Western?

MD: well I came as a Sociology professor, and my own background is, I have a background in Latin American studies. So, Latin America is my specialty. I lived, I studied in Latin America—I lived in Latin America. I've worked, actually, the last job I had before I went to grad school was I worked in the ministry of agriculture. Working on land reform in Nicaragua.

ZA: Oh, nice.

MD: So, I lived there for about—so each of these various countries—so I lived in South America, Chile and Argentina, Mexico, and then the last country I lived in was Nicaragua where I worked for, as I said, I was in the ministry of agriculture in their research department. Was there for about four or five years. And I always tell the anecdote that my sons stopped speaking to me in English [laughter], and so it was both professional experience and a family experience. And so, then I can turn to the US to go to grad school, and since then, when I came to Western, I felt like I was looking for a way to put my Latin American studies background, and to implement that in the academic curriculum. And work with students and so I feel that has worked out well. Bringing my Latin American background into the Willamette Valley where so many students have a—so many students have an immigration background, that they come from countries rooted in Latin America, and so I feel like that's been a very--it's been a wonderful match for me. And has made this experience-time has flown by. [laughter] I've been here since 1993, and it's like yesterday. [laughter].

ZA: Okay, would give us some examples of the kinds of work you do here, and I guess alongside that, what would be typical work day for you?

MD: Okay yeah, that's a really good question. So, the way that I combined my Latin American background with, then, teaching. In my curriculum and working with students at Western was—I was to think of this process as a transnational process. Or, so I feel that I'm a transnational, or that the studies—that isn't what we call it officially. But, the focus has been kind of a transnational focus. So that I feel that my classroom experience, I draw on Latin American origins. And then can focus on that, and sort of bring that to enrich Latino classes on Chicano studies and teach, you know, different social problems or maybe courses, and so I can bring that

together. Now by transnational, by what I mean is: one, is looking at the roots in Latin America, how do we understand what happened in Latin America as related to the process here. But also, what I've done is, I've also taken students and have encouraged students to also study abroad and have experiences in Latin America. So, I see it as a dual process, so examples that some of the things that I've done are—what, from on the one hand, I went to Mexico, and I decided to visit the primary towns, in Michoacán, which are the primary sending-cities in the state of Michoacán, for students who come to particularly to the Salem, Keizer area. Oh, I should mention, so what I did was I developed a program in this transnational—in its—in my transnational focus, what I—one of the projects that I worked on at Western was to create a Latino Mentor program. So, what that meant was, we, actually, we emerged out of one of my classes, and when we were looking at the problem behind Latino dropout rate nationally. Why was that?—and we were studying that in the Chicano studies class, so some of the students and myself, we actually began looking at the process, well, “Can't we do more than just study this problem, can't we part of the solution?” And, well, so I began, I initiated this Latino mentor program—so first of all, we went into the high schools and sort of participate in, you know, advocacy programs, encouraging college—not only high school graduation but college participation. And then it expanded. I go into—I also take students into juvenile detention, into where youth are incarcerated, and we particularly worked to encourage that youth group, that group of youth to also finish high school and go onto college. And then expanding that, I also, right now, I'm organizing a project; we're going to, taking some students into the Oregon State penitentiary, where we're working with Latino—with the Latino club—sort of bringing educational from and bringing Western students into that process. So, in this process, I'm sort of working with immigrants and immigrant population in Oregon, as I said, I discovered, that, there were—there's about three or four major towns in Michoacán in state of central, in central Mexico, which are the origin sites, where most of the immigrants—particularly in the [Willamette] Valley. So, I decided to visit them. So I went and visited; there are about four of them. And these are towns that are quite isolated, and they're out of the way; but, it gave me a tremendous insight and background to understand, you know, Western students, many students. In fact it's rare that I have a Latino student in my class who isn't from one of those towns or knows someone from one of those towns. [laughter]. So, it gave me a tremendous insight to do that, but then the following stage of this process was also with the basis of the Latino mentor

program. Was then to take students to Latin America. So right now, my pet project is—I've been taking students that are trying to create this in a larger level, but I'm taking students to work in the prison system, in Argentina. So now I'm focused on working on Argentina. And—so we're setting up an internship process, so that students can go and particularly work with youth, incarcerated youth, and incarcerated women. And with the idea of seeing this particular way the prisons work in Latin America, in a comparative context. I think it gives students a great background into alternative ways that prisons can be organized. That prisons can be managed. That we can think about what is the role of prison in society. And it's coincidental that I began doing this work in Latin America, that's become one of the primary topics in US social issues. Coincidental. But the timing of it—but I think it's been, I think, it's really positive to the students who've gone, really benefit, benefitted from the experience. So, I guess that's a long answer.
[laughter]

ZA: No, it's fine.

MD: To tell you about this idea of Transnational. That—I see Latin America, and the US in this sort of—I think we're all Americans. As they say in Spanish, in Latin America, they say “todos somos Americanos.” We are all Americans.

DR: Yeah.

MD: And so, I try to bring that perspective to my classroom, and I try to bring that experience, and in practical terms of internships, both locally—both in our community and internationally.

ZA: [inaudible]

MD: Is that—

ZA: Perfect [laughter]

[Question 3:]

Christie Macavei: So, just kinda getting a perspective of your daily life in Western Oregon, what was the most interesting, excuse me, experience that you had here?

MD: Well, as I said I've already explained some [laughter] quite interesting—

CM: --Right.--

MD: —topics—but, I forgot one! So I can add this one too [chuckling]: One of my new projects is—we're working, again, with the Latino Mentor Program and working with a group of students and we're working in both the Independence Museum, located right down the street here, right?, (practically) and in Salem in the Willamette Heritage Center, and what we were discovering is there's very little documentation, information about the Latino experience in the Valley in either museum. And even less what little topic—information, there was [inaudible], given the lack of information, we also felt like it was important to provide Spanish translation for documents that were there and basically created an orientation, so just like the mentor program of really creating a connection between the University and the Latino community. What we were doing is: so, we're both translating documents, but also the students are preparing as bilingual docents, bilingual, bicultural docents. And so we've been learning the content of the museum, we've been creating and developing a new process for outreach. And so right now, in fact on Wednesday, we're going to begin our first, our first walking tour in Spanish in Monmouth, Independence. So we're learning that in creating it. And then we're also going to work with—there's a local author who writes about haunted Independence [laughter] so some of the original historical buildings on the museum's walking tour are also a part of the haunted [tour], so we're gonna combine that, and working with that and so, combine those different areas and---so I think, that's for me, that's a really, exciting thing is to basically find creative ways to link our University with the larger community in which everyone is somehow better for it. So the community is able to develop its resources, the students gain: these tremendous skills for the students and look great on any resume. And besides, it makes it a lot of fun. [laughter]. So teaching and learning and being a part of the process, so for me a typical day would be, well teaching, but then also, working on these projects. So every week there's some ongoing project that we're developing [shuffling].

[Question 4:]

Nicholas Howes: Okay, and then, what are your plans and goals at Western now, and for the future?

Dolan: Well as I've said in what I'm really looking at is developing these projects both nat—both locally and internationally. So right, we are right in the process of trying to expand and create, an international, an international internships in Rosario, Argentina, and then secondly, expanding all of the local participation already in the schools, already in, juvenile detention and

in community, community activities as well. But particularly, now, this idea of expanding the museum, the museum community experience is what I'm immediately—and so—I'm really and hoping to see that develop.

NH: Okay, and is there anything else you would like to add about your experience working at Western?

MD: Oh, just that Western to me is like a very, it's a very exciting and interesting place to work. The students, I've never worked with students who are so engaged, interested, creative, and really open minded. So I really enjoyed my experience. I feel like, like all of the projects that I've described are things that really I'm—they create anew in conjunction, in collaboration with students, in so—maybe—that would be just to be sort of a shout out [laughter] to all of our great students! [laughter]

DR: Okay, all right, thank you so much.

CM: Thank you.

NH: Thank you very much.

DR: Yeah.

MD: So, there was one sentence there that needed, that I would've just inserted, but in the order that I was saying. [Nick clears throat]. So, that one sentence that I started talking about what I was doing, and then I wanted, I really wanted...[Recording ends.]