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Peter Callero Interview 2018

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Dr. Peter Callero Oral History Interview: October 19, 2018, HST 301

Cee Jay Eddie [CE]: This is Cee Jay Eddie with Antonia Scholerman [AS] and Erica Scoggins [ES] on October the 19th, 2018, interviewing Dr. Peter Callero [PC] professor of Sociology at Western Oregon University. We are in a classroom in Bellamy Hall.

PC: [coughs]

CE: M maps on the wall, air conditioner blowing, clock behind us.

PC: Dr. Callero's leaving to throw his gum out.

CE: Yup, Callero's getting up to throw his gum out for the interview.

ES: [Laughter] He's bailing on us; we got a runner! [Giggles].

CE: And I think that's pretty much the environment.

PC: [heard in hallway to Mark Henkels [Professor of Public Policy and Administration and Political Science]]: You can ask them.

PC [to interviewers]: You guys want a cookie?

Mark Henkels [MH]: Do you guys like cookies?

ES: I sure do.

AS: Sure.

MH: There ya go.

CE: Who doesn't like cookies? Fantastic!

MH: Courtesy of AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. Join a union when you get your work.

CE: Awesome. Thank you very much. We got that on tape too so... [Group laughter.] We'll plug you later.

CE: [clears throat]

PC: Okay.

CE: Okay, and picking back up with question one. Basically, these are just general overview questions to guide us through the process. You don't have to stick, you know, directly to the questions...

PC: Sure.

CE: ...they're just to, kind of, help give us an idea. Could you tell us Dr. Callero, when you started working here at Western?

PC: I started working here in December, 1985.

CE: Oh, wow.

PC: Yeah.

CE: I'm a December baby myself.

PC: Are you?

[Laughter.]

PC: You know, I was...

CE: December 6th, 1980.

PC: Yeah, I...

[Laughter]

PC: Really?

CE: Yeah.

PC: [coughs]

PC: Yeah, I, I think now, I am the longest-serving faculty member on campus.

CE: Really? That is an interesting point.

PC: Yes.

CE: Yeah, absolutely.

PC: Yeah, when I...

ES: That's pretty cool.

PC: ... in fact, when I arrived, they hadn't done any hiring for quite a while, and, in fact had been laying off faculty. [Sighs]. Because of the political-economic environment at the time and campus...

CE: That was during the change of the campus name right?

PC: It was right after they had gone from OCE [Oregon College of Education] and they, and we were WOSC at the time, Western Oregon State College. They had, been a major recession in Oregon. Tax base was down; like in-migration was limited. And it was just starting to pick up. And, so, I came at about that moment, then right soon after I was hired, many faculty that are now...

CE: Yeah.

PC: ... about retirement age also were hired.

CE: Sure. Were there special circumstances that kind of led you to, to seek Western at that time?

PC: Only one, and that was location. I, my wife and I—I was teaching, actually at a really nice position in the University of California system at UC—Riverside, and... But, we were both, grew up in Seattle. Our families were both from Seattle. Both, large Catholic...

CE: Yeah.

PC:... Italian families in Seattle. And, we started having kids. And we wanted to be closer to our families and—.

CE: Sure, and remain in the Pacific Northwest, and, yeah.

PC: to get into the Pacific Northwest, so to leave a job that paid quite a bit more...

CE: I'm sure.

PC: ...had a lot more to offer in the way of support for research.

CE: Were you tenured there?

PC: I was not. I was--I had only been there for three years. I was still assistant professor...

CE: Sure.

PC: ...non-tenured.

CE: [mumble] And so you came here in 1985, directly as a Professor of Sociology or—?

PC: Yeah, , so when I came there was no other sociologist here. There was no Sociology degree; there was nothing. And...

CE: Hmm.

PC: So that was part of the invitation, is to put together a degree program and major and hire some faculty.

CE: [simultaneous] And as Department Head and everything, sure.

PC: Right, right.

CE: And you still remain Department Head?

PC: Off and on.

CE: Mmm-hmm.

PC: Actually we pretty much shared it, and I'm not Department Chair this year.

CE: Sure.

PC: [inaudible] Have been...

CE: That's the responsibility, of like a it's your turn to carry that flag...

[Laughter]

PC: Yeah, I have been... Yeah, off and on I've been department chair for probably, I don't know, twenty of the years that I've been here.

CE: Sure, and you had your PhD originally in Seattle or you have you continued education or?

PC: No, my, we, I was got my PhD in Wisconsin, in University of Wisconsin, Madison, yeah, and from there went to UC Riverside, before coming up here.

CE: Wow, that's cool. So do you have roots from back East, or or was that just for education? Yeah. [Speaking at the same time.]

PC: I grew up in Seattle. No we, I—my wife and I both graduated from Seattle University. We both went to high school in Seattle. We met in high school.

CE: Yeah.

PC: So, you know, and we still have large families in Seattle.

CE: Sure.

PC: Yeah.

CE: Absolutely.

CE: Well, I'm going to turn this over to Erica...

PC: Okay.

CE: ...to ask the other questions.

ES: Hi, there. Can you give us some examples of the work that you do?

PC: Well, there's three main components that all faculty have, three main components of their job description. Number one is teaching, of course.

ES: Mmm-hmm.

PC: Second would be scholarship, research, publications: being active in your scholarly community. And then the third component is broadly defined as service, and that can be [sighs] developing curriculums, serving on different campus committees. I also to define it--faculty find it--to include, work with your, our union, also Faculty Senate, basically governance of the campus administration, and sort of the day-to... making sure this thing runs smoothly...

ES: Sure.

PC: ...on a daily basis.

ES: Absolutely. Can you give us an interesting experience that you have had here on campus?

PC: Yeah I've had a lot of them.

ES: [Laughing]

CE: [Laughing] Yeah, since 1985, sure.

ES: [Laughing]

PC: Well, you know, one of the more interesting teaching experiences, since I've been here at Western, was quite a while ago, wasn't actually on campus. We had a program where we taught inmates at Oregon State Penitentiary.

ES: Okay.

PC: So, I taught, and this was--faculty could volunteer to do that. The legislature has since abandoned that, for political reasons.

CE: Mmm-hmm.

PC: Which was too bad because it was a really positive program. We know it reduced recidivism and had all of these benefits all the way around.

ES: Sure.

PC: But I taught classes at Oregon State Penitentiary, at the women's correctional facility which used to be housed right next door to OSP [Oregon State Penitentiary], and then OSCI [Oregon

State Correctional Institution], which is the other prison out there off of Highway 22 as you're leaving Salem. But, a number of really interesting experiences, just teaching, students that were always there.

CE: Yeah.

PC: And never late.

ES: [laughs] Mmm-hmm. Yeah, that is interesting.

CE: Eager to be there, sure.

PC: Really eager to show up. And had--especially for sociologists--had really interesting life experiences.

ES: Mmm-hmm.

PC: So that was interesting I'd say.

ES: That does sound interesting.

CE: Yeah, it does.

PC: Yeah. Another interesting, sort of reflecting back moment was, when I was serving as the chair of the bargaining team for the union, and we came within hours of the first strike of faculty--Higher Ed faculty--in the history of the State of Oregon. And that was pretty tense, and we were all prepared.

CE: Yeah.

ES: Mmm-hmm.

PC: Media was there and, but we struck a last minute deal.

CE: Yeah, what spared it?

PC: Yeah, yeah.

CE: Just a last minute deal with legislators or...?

PC: Well, we negotiate with administration. So the faculty, has a contract that is with the State of Oregon, but the administrators are the ones that make the deal. But the govern— at this point, the governor was involved too, so, yeah, it was—.

CE: I would think at that point, yeah.

ES: Intense.

PC: Yeah.

ES: [Laughs] Well, great. Thank you so much. I'm going to go ahead and pass you over to Antonia.

PC: Okay.

AS: So I'll be taking over the last little part of the interview. What are your plans and goals at Western now and for the future?

PC: Retire.

[Laughter]

PC: No, seriously, I've got—I've just come to this decision. After this year, two more years. And then it's, it's a little bit of a challenge; these, this transition because my colleague— there's only three full-time tenure-track faculty in the Sociology department. We have a couple of part-time adjuncts that teach courses too. But my colleague, Dr. Braa [Dr. Dean Braa, Professor of Sociology], is going to be retiring after the end of next year, and I am going to be retiring after the following year. And our colleague, Dr. Dolan [Dr. Maureen Dolan, Professor of Sociology] hasn't committed yet, but she admits that it's close. So we're really conscious about making sure that this transition, is going to be smooth, and it's not— it's going to be good for the students. And, the difficulty is we will probably be seeing a whole group of junior faculty, non-tenured faculty, without...

CE: Mmm-hmm.

PC: ...you know that institutional memory or the history behind that.

CE: [speaking at the same time] Right.

CE: Is there going to be like a, like an emeritus position or something like that?

PC: Well, there's always emeritus position, but, but those are more just a ceremonial titles, you know.

CE: [speaking at the same time] It helps the transition, yeah.

PC: But no, so what we will probably do, is they do have an option where you can do a phased retirement where you can remain and teach. You know, administration has to approve this, but retiring faculty can teach, you know, part-time for a couple years afterwards.

AS: Mmm-hmm.

PC: And, you know, I think some of us might be interested in doing that.

CE: Mmm-hmm. Just to at least help oversee some of the newer...

PC: Yeah.

CE: ...instructors.

PC: But you know what? Look, I came.

[Laughter]

CE: I conquered. I did it.

ES: [Unintelligible]

PC: [Overlapping] You know, I was, I was barely thirty years old and I, you know, with nothing. And I survived, barely, but I survived. And you know there's— they have colleagues in the hallway and stuff, so.

CE: Sure.

PC: They're grown-ups.

[Laughter]

PC: They'll do just fine without us.

CE: Yeah.

PC: Yeah.

AS: So, is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences working here?

PC: Just—I would say that, when I first came, the first couple years, I thought it was the biggest mistake of my life. The amount of work, the heavy, heavy teaching load, the lack of support for your research. And being a young father with a growing family, and all of the stress and tension that goes with that didn't help. But, in hindsight, you know, it's been the best decision I've ever made just because the students here are really inspiring, mainly because most of them are first generation...

ES: Mmm-hmm.

PC: ...or... and they're eager. And, I don't want to compare them to my students at, in the prison, but there is some similarity. I mean I have taught at, you know, a number of other universities, and so I can compare Western students. And that's the one thing that I'm really happy about, making that decision.

CE: Sure.

PC: And coming here.

CE: I think that's—I think there is a thirst, if you will, that's kind of rising a kind of accumulating, I guess, if you will, in the hearts of young Americans right now, you know. I think that things are becoming more aware and more available and people are wanting to become more educated and—.

PC: Well not only that—I agree with you one hundred percent. And then in addition in my field of sociology, it's always exciting because you're always taking these basic scientific principles and theories and engaging the issues of the day. And so, you know, when times are worse, when you have the greatest economic recessions, or when you have despotic presidential leaders...

CE: Mmm-hmm.

PC: ...in this country, you can take those as moments to kind of under—in the classroom and get the debate going and understand the dynamics of social movements and social change and politics and so—.

CE: It becomes revolutionary almost, I guess, yeah.

PC: Oh, it's just—

CE: Yeah.

PC: It's really--I'm definitely going to miss that part.

CE: Yeah.

PC: And I won't—I will have definitely much more time to do my writing and my publishing when I retire, but I'm going to miss the classroom for sure.

CE: Yeah.

PC: Yeah.

CE: I can imagine.

ES: I'm sure the classroom will miss you as well.

CE: Yeah.

PC: Well, you've never had a class from me.

[Laughter]

PC: [overlapping] So you don't know.

[Laughter]

CE: Yeah. You sound like a great and amazing instructor for sure.

PC: Oh, thank you.

CE: So, we appreciate your time. And, and yeah.

AS: Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today.

PC: Well, it's my pleasure. You guys can take those with you.

[Laughter]

ES: Cookies!

PC: Yeah.

[Laughter]

CE: All right, signing off here.

[Recorder cuts off]

[End of transcription]