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Starting at 00:00:00

NS: Hello today we are interviewing Rob Winningham, interim provost and vice president of academic affairs and professor of behavioral science. This interview is for Professor Doellinger's 408 oral history class. This interview is a part of the Oregon err-- Western Oregon University Oral History Project. My name is Nick Sieber, this is Hudson Kennedy, Gabe Yanez and Chloe Miller. We will now start the interview.

RW: Great.

NS: When did you start working here?

RW: I started working here September 16th 2000.

NS: Okay. What kind of circumstances brought you to Western?

RW: So I was finishing up my Ph.D. at Baylor University in Texas and I grew up in Seattle you know just living in Texas it made me realize that I needed to get back to the west coast so I mostly applied to tenure track positions on the west coast and got an interview and got a job. I actually had a choice of going to Colorado College in Colorado Springs or Western Oregon University and I chose Western Oregon University.

NS: Cool, thank you. We know you have held other positions here as well out of the positions that you've held which one would you say are your favorite?

RW: Well you know the favorite position you know it changes over time, I really enjoyed my time being a professor, I started teaching at the college level in 1997 and its just its a wonderful profession its what I started to work to become when I was 20 or 21 years old and it was all I'd ever done and its actually it kind of hard to think about not being a professor its such a part of your identity so thats you know nearly 30 years-- I mean that kind of what I've been focusing on. So there were-- at times you know that was what I did its what I ate its what I breathed its what I thought about and then I slowly transitioned into to doing other things division chair, and dean and now serving as the Provost so its hard to say which one is the favorite they all have their moments but I have to admit the time where I feel most exhilarated was after a new lecture where the students were just into it you know and the new lectures are the best cuz there the freshest and you just thought about it and you spent five hours getting ready for that one hour lecture and there's times where just walking out of ITC 211 that I just felt like just screaming or jumping so I think thats when I've been the most exhilarated.

NS: Awesome! Thank you.

RW: Yeah.

HK: What would you say your basis for your job is here at Western?

RW: The basis for the job at Western? You know currently the job is Provost. I don't think most people even know what a Provost is. You know like what is a Provost? So some Universities will call it chief academic officer. Some Universities is called the number two person behind the

President. But it's overseeing all the academics. It's overseeing both the colleges, its overseeing the library, its overseeing academic advising, the policies, the curriculum. We've had 500 course proposals this year because we're changing the general education curriculum. At the same time we are trying to develop a new doctor of physical therapy program. So it's overseeing all of that, the academic affairs portion of the university. Which is you know two thirds or three quarters of the budget goes to academic affairs so it's a lot of oversight.

HK: You touched on it briefly too, but would you give some examples of specifics of your job that you're doing currently.

RW: Yeah you know some of the specifics, it's everything from working with the deans, the Associate Provost, the other leaders of campus. An example of that type of work is, well just the last meeting I had, we're kind of planning the general education roll out, you know who's going to be leading that effort. And space issues, where's that space going to be? We're going to be remodeling the ITC building next year so people are moving out. So it's everything. It's also the, you know the registrar's office. So, we've had some things pop up today with the registrar's office and the people in the registrar's office which require attention. Later this week we'll go to Woodburn to look at some clinics at Salem Hospital because they might partner with us for the doctor of physical therapy program. Looking at the modular that they have there and how much it costs, so it really is everything. From the people, to the buildings, to working with the students and the policies so, it's a lot of different things. And it's kind of hard to keep track of. You need to have a good team, you need to delegate. There's only you know, you work twelve hours a day on this job. Bu there's only eight hours a day from nine to five, so you really have to delegate and ask others to do things.

HK: Would you, could you go through a typical work for you?

RW: A typical workday. I can pull up my calendar. A typical work, so it begins in the five AM hour. So you know get up at five AM. Brew some coffee, and then try to clear the email. You know the email will come in overnight, I try to have it clear at the end of the day. And then a lot of it is, so at the six o'clock hour today, I was trying to get ready for all the meetings today, so just making I sure an agenda, what do I need to be doing for those meetings, making sure their lined up. And then get the kids to school and then land here at eight o'clock. Today we had a meeting from eight thirty to ten thirty with the President's cabinet. So that's all the vice-

presidents. And we were looking at the University Budget Advisory Committee Proposals, there were seventy-two proposals we were looking at. And then after a meeting like that you end up with a bunch of work. And so you can't book all. So I had thirty minutes to try to fire off some emails to ask people to do some things. After that, it's a lot of meetings. And then it's the direct reports. So there's eleven direct reports, I was interacting with the dean, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences after that. I did have a little bit of downtime today, for example, to read a position paper on how to structure a Provost office. And just kind of seeing in terms of the personnel how to do that. Then I had a 90 minute meeting with the Associate Provost. She's also a Biology Professor, talking about all the things that she's doing, kind of getting feedback. After that meeting I had three things to do. I always star, if people are in a meeting with me and they figure this out. If I star something in my notes that means I am going to do something afterwards. And so I had three to-do's after that 90 minute meeting that I would do. One of them is I am going to be reaching out to a professor to see if he's willing to serve in an increased capacity next year based on the meeting that I had before. After we're done here I'll circle back, I'll go back to the email. Kind of make sure there's no crises have popped up, and then I'll go back to my to-do list on some of the longer term things to do. And try to cross off as many of them as I can. It's kind of like playing a video game you know? Where you get a little hit of dopamine, you know you do it it's like I'm afraid, my, one of my, my oldest daughter I'm afraid she's on the verge on becoming addicted to Sims 4 but it's really similar because she's trying to do things. She's trying to keep everybody going and keep everybody alive. But every time you accomplish a little task there's a little hit of dopamine and it kinda keeps you going.

GY: So, what is the most interesting experience you had while working at Western?

RW: The most interesting experience? You know the ones that stick out in my mind are the long term projects. Cause that's what I love to do, I love to get the right people together, you know try to empower them, to motivate them. My background is in psychology and you know psychology is largely about human behaviour so it's exciting to do that type of work. You know, I think one of the biggest projects that I did back in 2004, Dr. Brian Dutton and I, we went to a conference in Trenton, New Jersey by the Council of Undergraduate Research and it was highly institutionalized undergraduate research opportunities, scholarship opportunities at Western, and we do a good job of this here at Western. You know, we don't have as many graduate programs

as, say Oregon State or University of Oregon does, and so we can really focus more time on the undergraduates and we are doing a lot of that in Psychology at the time. I always had a half a dozen research assistants, publishing papers and doing work together. So, Doctor Dutton and I went to this conference and talked about how to do this and we came back we got a team of ten people, ten different professors, from across campus and we created the Program of Undergraduate Research Experiences and we created the Academic Excellence Showcase, we kind of changed that, so something that you all know. We got the faculty to not -- we recommended that they didn't teach classes during that, that they release the students and that process of working with the faculty to kind of create something like that, that benefit the students for 14 years later we are still doing it. I think that was the most interesting or I might say the most rewarding thing that I've done at Western.

GY: Thank you.

CM: What are your plans and goals at Western now and for the future?

RW: You know the plans and goals at Western for now and in the future are, to be honest, long term sustainability and – of the institution. So, I don't know this probably isn't something that you would necessarily know but we actually are flat and on the downward trend for the number of seniors graduating from high school coming to a university. So, we have to do something different if we're gonna stay as large and viable as we are and so a number of things that were doing to keep Western viable is, we've started – I don't know if you've heard but we now have a campus in Salem. So WOU Salem and then that's one of the things were going to do. There's four hundred and twelve thousand Oregonians that have some college and no degree. The majority of them are in the Willamette Valley. And, so to have a campus there where they can finish their degree, it is important. The other thing that were doing though – we've long been known as an education college and, I bet even some people you talk went to Western and they'll tell you, "Oh I remember that when it was OCE", the Oregon College of Education, or you know if their more my age they might say "I remember when it was WOSC", Western Oregon State College and so a lot of people view Western as the teacher's college and we still are, that's an important mission for us. It is approximately a third, maybe a little less than a third of our campus is the College of Education. One of the things that I would like to do though is to expand

our healthcare footprint and do a bit of a pivot towards healthcare. We still can support the liberal arts - or the History department is a very important and vibrant part of the liberal arts and you know I could just list them off; as is Anthropology, I think Psychology is in there, Sociology, Geography, and the sciences as well. So, you know I don't think we need to take anything away from that, but we do need to – to stay relevant and I think that you know, many people in the public want an institution where people can come and get a career, you know, and I think the healthcare field is a demographic that's in our favor. Like I said, the graduating eighteen-year old's coming to Western, those numbers are on the decline. We're also getting competition from outside of Western and the Valley from some national universities trying to offer online education and that's a pressure on us. But one of the demographics that are in our favor is the need for more healthcare professionals. We also have a growing aging population and the number of retirees in Oregon is growing twice as fast the national average and that is gonna require certain types of healthcare professions. So, for example, were trying to create a doctor of physical therapy program. Just three years after earning the bachelor's degree, the average salary is about eighty thousand dollars a year. Those are the types of jobs that I think a lot of the students that are interested in Western want to have. And so, I think that is an important part of moving forward.

CM: Finally, is there anything you'd like to add about your experiences here at WOU or something you would like to tell the community?

RW: Well something that I want to tell the community – and maybe you all know this – but Western is a special place. And I think some of the things that makes Western special – like I was saying earlier – that you can work more closely with a professor. If you go to some of the larger universities, your courses are actually taught by graduate students where most of your courses here frankly - I think all of your courses in the history department, for example, are taught by people that have earned a Ph.D., that have done research, that are experts in their field and that's not the case and it's a big difference. You know, it seems like – I'm not gonna disparage any school, but let's say you go to blank state university, you know, you think, "Wow this is great! I'm going to this – one of the state universities." You might even be going to the flagship university. But it's ironic that you go to what might seem to be a better school from the public perception, but you're gonna be taught by a graduate student that might have had a year or two of education beyond earning their bachelor's degree. We're gonna call that a better

education? And so, I think that people need to realize that Western is a special place in that sense. The other thing about Western is, it's a place where upward social mobility still exists. And I went to a school that was like that as well. I went to Western Washington University and it was a place where if you were bright, hardworking, it didn't matter the family you came from. It didn't matter if your family was upper middle class or upper class or if your parents went to college or not. If you worked hard than you could rise up and get a good job and so what I like to say about Western is, Western not only changes lives, it changes generations because if you get your degree now, and – if for example you were the first in your family to go to college like I was, it's gonna change my children's lives and it's gonna change my grandchildren's lives by having that. That is not true at every university and I went to Baylor University. I don't know if people - why you would know this about Baylor but it's mostly upper-middle class, you know, and it was very affluent and so in economics they'll talk about having, you know – what's the value add. If you go to a Baylor if you go to a Princeton if you go to a Stanford, there's not a lot of value add. You know, you already have the benefits of maybe even a private K-12 education, you have the benefits of your parents' connections and those people are gonna do well no matter what they do. But here at Western if you come here there's a lot that's added, and upward social mobility still exists here.

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