

Dr. Megan Patton-Lopez,
Assistant Professor, Community Health
Division of Health and Exercise Science
Western Oregon University
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Oral History Interview Transcript: Dr. Megan Patton-Lopez

Interviewers:

JO: James Owens

MT: Morgan Taylor

CE: Cee Jay Eddie

Interviewee:

MPL: Dr. Megan Patton-Lopez

Transcribed by: James Owens, Morgan Taylor, and Cee Jay Eddie

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JO: Good Afternoon, today's date is February 11th 2019, I am James Owens here with Morgan Taylor and Cee Jay Eddie and we are conducting an oral history interview with Dr. Megan Patton-Lopez, Assistant Professor/Community Health in the Division of Health and Exercise Science here at Western Oregon University. We are in Dr. Patton-Lopez's office room 240 in the Richard Woodcock Education Center. Without further adieu, Dr. Patton-Lopez when did you start working at Western?

MPL: I first started working back in 2009, 2010 I taught one class: nutrition. Well two classes: nutrition for undergrads all three quarters, but then I also taught a master's level class in, for teachers, in the MAT program on: food insecurity and health, and that was a fun class. So I did that in 2009, 2010 and then off and on I've taught for classes whenever there was a need. I've been in the area, I've worked as a at the local health department in I completed my Ph.D. here at OSU- Oregon State in my postdoc and so I was around whenever there was a need for a fill-in, I was happy to help out. But this is actually my second year now in a full-time tenure track. So I started officially full-time 2018, 2017. Yea 2018.

JO: Awesome. What led you to come to work at Western?

MPL: Well, I first started working here because my husband was a faculty member and they needed someone to teach nutrition. And my background is in nutrition and my Ph.D. and public health but I am also a registered dietitian and so the opportunity to teach undergraduate nutrition was a lot of fun. So there was a need for nutrition and so while I was finishing my dissertation and my daughter was just born, she was a year old, so it was a nice way to get started. So that's how I got, I was here, how I got brought here originally but since that time I've just really, I think that was how I discovered Western. But what brought me here was really the opportunity to teach and to work with students, primarily undergraduate student's, who are passionate about, in this case health, and, and giving back to their communities, I saw when I was teaching before just the one or two classes a quarter. I was really inspired by the just the amount of passion that students have and I am also a first generation college student. I was the first person in the family and to go onto college and then go on to Master's and Ph.D. And when I was deciding what to do I just finished my Master's degree. I was working as a trio-counselor with middle school and high school students in Louisville, Kentucky. And that's when I realized the important role of mentors for these students and I was taking them on field trips, we go to college campuses, and I was working with them on filling out Financial Aid and kind of test taking tips. But I, I really realized that if it hadn't been for my professor's when I was in undergrad, if I would've been on the path that I was on. And so that is when I decided to go back to school and to pursue a Ph.D. so that I could be a faculty member, [Inaudible], at a university that was predominantly first generation, so.

JO: Ok, you've mentioned you had different roles here at Western, what all were they?

MPL: Well I've always been an instructor and then some, you know teaching a class, preparing and teaching a class. But when I was in 2009 and off and on I was just filling in. So I was part-time and so when I came, when I started here, there was a position that was full-time tenure track. And that's what I've, what I applied to be and so now I am here full-time. I have no other, before I was always doing Western and something else, now I am just Western.

JO: Nice

MT: What is the basis for your job at Western?

MPL: My main roles and responsibilities?

MT: Yes.

MPL: Yes. Teaching, predominantly teaching, I teach three classes a quarter. And right now one of those classes is a core-class, for the major, but then others are electives. So it's predominantly student centered, advising, developing classes that are hands on and engaging, I hope and you know, getting I feel like my role is to help students understand what is community health and the role and the role of a community health worker. So in addition to just the content that we have in the textbook, I also try to expose students to different, oppor- different careers and resources that are in our community, because I have had that opportunity of working in local health department, I've, I have developed relationships in different areas that are bring guest lecturers and, and try to make connections for students. I've found for myself as a first generation college student, those networks, or the lack thereof, ma- make or break, made or break my ability to get a good job, and you know, to go, to know what would the next step would be. So, I really focus a lot on helping students prepare. Not only pass the class, but also to prepare for what comes next. I also do research. I have scholarship work that I do, and I focus on food and security. Particularly, among low income, college students, but I also do work with low income Latina families, Latino families, and interview mothers and, I also do work around access to physical activity resources, such as parks and safe places to play. And with those, opportunities for scholarships, I always work with students and so I am working right now with an undergraduate student who is a senior and she is helping me with the food and security among college students and the food and security among latina families, and I am also working with a master student on another project. So, It's all student centered.

JO: Excellent

MT: Okay, what is a typical work day like for you?

MPL: It varies. I try to, on days that I need to teach early in the morning, I usually try to get here an hour ahead of time, at least, so, just to make sure I am ready to go. But, I prepare for classes, I update my Powerpoint slides, or try to look for something fun and interesting that's hands-on that kinda expands upon what the readings were about or im connecting with guest lecturers and, and, and- arranging those visits. It could also be, lately, I have been doing a lot of interviews and focus groups for my Food and Security Among College Students, scholarship, project. It just really varies, it, there's really- every week I have to sit down and kinda look at what's on the docket and kinda try to manage my time, you know, definitely I have the core class, the classes, that I am teaching, those don't change. But, it's just trying to get everything else in, within a reasonable amount of time, so I still have time for exercise and being with my family, and all of that. So, it is a bit of a juggling.

MT: What is the most interesting experience you have had while working at Western?

MPL: I think, definitely the ideas of the students have been the most interesting. [Inaudible] their observations and their conversations that we have, and really getting to know the students and their background a little more indepthly. You know, I come from, I have my lived experience, but I grew up in the midwest, and, and so learning more about the students from Oregon and their backgrounds, has been really interesting to me. The other thing too, is, I feel like the students here are, they have some really good ideas, like the Food and Security Among College Students, that was an idea brought forward by students in one of the classes, and it just so happened that my dissertation was on food and security. And, so, the students, we did a survey back in 2012, working at the time, my spouse, my husband was here, and so working with him and the students, we, collected data and we wrote an article and that was the first time that

an article had been published on, in the continental U.S. And since that time, it's gained a lot of traction and we have been recognized for our work, but it was the ideas of the students, you know, and I always mention that, that this was the students, this is because this was their lived experience and this is something they were passionate about. So, I think that's one of the most interesting things, is just, really connecting with the students and helping support their, their ideas and passion.

CE: Fantastic, Dr. Megan Patton-Lopez, My name is Cee Jay Eddie. To conclude our interview, could you tell us what your plans and goals at Western are for now and in the future?

MPL: For now, like I said, I'm in my second year. So, I am still developing and ya know, developing my classes and developing relationships with students and so, one thing I would really like to do within the next couple of years is to have developed an experiential class, or course, where I am actively engaging with students and we are going out into the community working on food and security and access to safe places to play for low income families and children. Where that would be, I don't know yet, I'm still developing relationships, but I think it's really important that it be somewhere where the students are gonna give- are giving back to the community, so we are adding value to the exper- to the commun- the citizens and we are able to develop long term relationships, so it's not a one time thing, it's something that we come back to every year. So, that's something I would to accomplish within the next couple of years, I think that Western, as an institution, we really have a neat opportunity to- there's a history of being responsive to student needs and so- in the area of ya know, food and security, and supporting student to be the best that they can be and to succeed and to meet the strategic plan- all the goals we have in the strategic plan, I think food, access and security is an important element of that, so I'm just really excited about the potential and I'd kinda like to see where that goes but I think because of our size and the history of what has been done in the past and the community partners there are at the state level, I think it would be really cool to have success in that area.

CE: Yeah, that's appreciated too, coming from an instructor, professor and to have someone with that kind of vision for their students. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences working here?

MPL: No, I think that's about all.

CE: Yeah?

MPL: mm-hmm.

CE: Great, well thank you very much.

MPL: Thank you.

JO: Yeah, thank you for your time.

MPL: Your welcome, thanks for the invitation.

JO: Yes ma'am.

CE: Absolutely, and this concludes our interview.

JO: Yep.

MPL: Great, yay!