

Dr. Mary Pettenger,
Professor, Department of Politics, Policy, and Administration
Division Chair, Social Science
Western Oregon University
February 3, 2020



Oral History Interview Transcript: Dr. Mary Pettenger

Interviewers:

TA: Teresa Anderson

SB: Savanna Bailey

TF: TJ Fennimore

Interviewee:

MP: Dr. Mary Pettenger

Transcribed By: Teresa Anderson, Savanna Bailey, TJ Fennimore

Audit/Edit: Teresa Anderson, Savanna Bailey, TJ Fennimore

TA: Welcome to Oral Histories of Western Oregon University. Today is Monday, February 3, 2020. Our interview is being held at the Social Sciences Conference Room in Bellamy Hall. With us is Dr. Mary Pettenger, Professor of Politics, Policy and Administration. We have three interviewers today, myself, Teresa Anderson.

SB: Savanna Bailey

TF: TJ Fennimore

TA: Thank you Dr. Pettenger.

MP: Thank you.

TA: Our first question would be; when did you start working at Western? And what were the circumstances that led you to work at Western? And have you held different positions here and if so, what were they?

MP: So, I was glad to get the questions ahead of time so it gave me a chance to think about it. So, I was hired in September of 2003, so it was my start date and I was...I don't know if? There's ranks of professors. So when I started, you come in as an assistant non tenure, or tenure track so eventually you get tenure and then so, kind of a just a new professor if that makes sense so you start kind of at the learning stage. And I am originally from the Northwest and I went to graduate school in Denver and then my wife got a job at Mutual of Omaha, so we lived in Omaha, Nebraska for a while and it wasn't where we wanted to stay, we have two children and Nebraska wouldn't allow her to adopt. So, I would have to give up parental rights for her to adopt the children so we really wanted to move somewhere we could be affirmed as a family and then my parents and her parents live in the Northwest so we decided to look for jobs in the Northwest and to see whoever got one first, so, I applied and was accepted to teach at Western. So, it was kind of a roundabout way, it wasn't- it was more to see where the jobs were at the time cause there's, it's a pretty tight profession to try and find jobs, so there is not a lot of openings, so, but I think it fits me really well.

Okay, so different positions, so, as a professor you go through different ranks. So, I started as an assistant like I talked about and then after a certain time period you can apply to become, get tenure, and become an associate professor so, that I did that... I don't remember the exact year but it was in my fourth year. Yeah, third? Yeah, fourth year here. Then you become an associate professor and then I was that for five years and then became a full professor so, that's the kind of the academic ranking for that. And then off and on there- so, I was the department chair twice as part of the department but that's more we just move that around its not, it's more of a have to do than I am willing to do. But then about a year and a half ago our division selects our division chair and so that time they had five, six departments now we have five departments, and so, you are nominated or nominate yourself and then there is a voting process. So, the division selected me as division chair, so, that is kind of a somewhat lower management

level, it's half time teaching, half time management and its more just running the logistics of the division. So that's- and it's a three-year term renewable once so, I might be doing that for a few more years depending on what my colleagues think. And so, that's yeah. That's the different positions I have had, does that answer what you're looking for? Okay.

SB: Yeah, wonderful. So, what is the basis for your job at Western? Would you give us examples of the kind of work that you do here and what does a typical work day look like for you?

MP: So, I have the two different roles. So, I have both the professor role and then the division chair role- so, I don't know would you like to know about both of those...

SB: Both would be wonderful.

MP: Okay because it's- it is very very strikingly different. So, I think professor is- I assume most students kind of have a sense of what happens because you see in the classroom. So, it's a lot of preparing for classes, doing background research to keep up with the field. My field is International Relations and we're a small department. So International Relations is a very broad area. So, I teach classes all the way- I have a Causes of War class, so that's more the conflict side, all the way down to, human rights so it's more the peace side of things. So, it's a very- I teach a lot of breadth in that area so, it's a lot of classes and preparing for classes. Grading, that's probably the thing that students probably like the least is doing assignments and I think grading is the hardest. That's one thing I procrastinate on the most with. So, that's kind of the classic, is the teaching side. We also do service. So, we do a lot of advising for students and... we serve on committees. So, there's committees at the division level and then the school level and then also in the community. So... right now I don't have any outside of Western service because of my- the division chair role. But in the past, I have been on boards at my library or in my professional association. And then research. So that's the big part and that's the fun things that I like to do. So that's when I learn a lot of the things I did for my Ph.D. dissertation on

climate change. So, I've also been working recently on researching pedagogy. So, learning in the classroom. So that's kind of the standard things that professors do in terms of teaching, service, research.

Okay so, on the other side of that then um... so in the division chair role, and you kind of caught me in a moment when things have been like a little hectic. So, one of my friends who's the division chair describes it as trying to put out fires with a squirt gun. So, it's a lot of trying to take care of things. I... I'm trying to think of a typical- there's a lot of emails that come through, "Can you do this," "We need that," it's a lot of conveying information. Getting committees filled, or taking care of the student has a question about a class counting or everything to the student has a complaint about a professor, so there's a lot of... just a big role without- it's a lot of advising for students who aren't sure in their major or in this area. I'll advise them. So, a lot of attending meetings. [Laughter] That's what I've been doing a lot more of than I realize that I ever would be. So, it's kind of a... a mixture. So, for example today I started off at 9:00 o'clock for a meeting for an event we're coordinating and then a two hours of class and then I had my department meeting and then I met with a student and I had a little bit of a break and then I met with another student and then I'm meeting with you and another student and then I'm meeting with three more students from four to five. So, it's kind of like a typical day so, tomorrow I'll have more meetings so, yeah. So, I end up doing a lot of my prep work on the weekends. And I would say right now I'm... yeah there's, there's a lot.

SB: Pretty busy. [Laughter]

MP: Yes, I would say that's a lot of information that might be more than what you want.

SB: No.

MP: Okay.

TF: Yeah, so what is the most interesting experience you've had working at Western?

MP: I went around a lot of different things with that, in terms of what is an interesting experience for me. I... I decided to come down to what do I enjoy the most, the most memories that I have. Its uh, its, I couldn't pick so it's not just one so I have two. I'm an advisor for the Model United Nations club, and that to me I think is- creates the most memories for me, cause I have of lot of going on trips with students and getting to know students, and watching students really change and grow. So, I have students who refuse to talk, and they wouldn't stand up and give a speech, and then after time they started doing that and got more comfortable and.... So, I really enjoy that a lot, and just watching students get really involved in the world and getting excited. And then my other... Yeah, is really keeping in touch with students who graduated. So that's what I- when I was thinking about what interesting for me meant, what will make- what makes- gives me the most pleasure in the job I have, and so I really like when I have a student who's, you know gone for a while and they send me a email or communicating- I have a student who graduated six or seven years ago and he sends me questions about current events. So, he has this like long, you know it takes me a while to respond to him, and then he responds back, and then we go back and forth about the news and so... To me that means that I've had an impact on a somebody. So that's one of the reasons where I really like teaching, is having that connection with students. So... yeah, the most interesting [Laughter] was it took me a lot of directions- exactly what that means. So, okay.

TF: Alright, thank you.

MP: So, that answers kind of what you're thinking?

TF: Yep.

MP: Okay.

SB: What are your plans and goals at Western, now and for the future? Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences working here?

MP: So... Career wise, I would say I'm about into the two-thirds process of it, in terms of the length of time that people have been here. So, I... I don't plan to work- obviously I'm not gonna announce when I'm gonna- in public, when I plan to retire. But I... I really- I like teaching a lot, but I don't plan to teach until... I can't teach anymore, if that makes sense? So, that's what I say about the two-thirds into it. So, thinking about- and that was a good question for me to kind of think about what are my goals right now. So, right now I want to survive the rest of the division chair process. So, I have hopefully four more years. I've enjoyed that, I enjoy helping my colleagues. It's been the- that's one thing with the squirt gun though, every once in a while, I can actually do something real. I can help a student graduate or I can help a colleague with a really serious problem, get it taken care of. So, I like that and that's four years right now for me, I'd like to continue in that role for the four years.

After that I'm really excited to go back to my department and just- that sounds funny "just" teach. So... there's been some classes I wanted to develop. I also advise in the International Studies major. And that's something- that's what my degree is, my doctorate is in International Studies. And so, I'd like to expand that program. If I had my dream and if I like won the lottery, I would try to have an International Studies center here on campus. So, that's kind of if I had goals for the future, if I could achieve those. If- otherwise I really, I think our department is pretty vibrant and so we have a lot of ideas about change and the future and to see- try to grow a little bit more in what we do. So that's kind of my personal goals in that way. Survive and thrive, okay. [Laughter]

And then, I don't know just- for me, that bigger question and what else would I like to add... When I was looking for teaching positions I really didn't know what kind of school what I wanted to teach at, but I wanted teaching more than research. There's different types of university, and Western is more of a teaching school versus a research school. And I really... I never planned to be a teacher. It was

something that when I went to get my Master's Degree, I was gonna go work in development in Latin America and I ended up not going in that direction and getting funding and then started teaching and went "AHH, I really like this," and so, one of the things that's been most rewarding about Western is that I can do that. I can really focus on the teaching side, and so, I really- Western fits me. It has taken... you know there's always this kid of like, is it the right place, do I wanna stay here. I'm always saying you know, what am I gonna be when I grow up, I'm still not sure but I really like teaching. And so Western has been a really good place for that and I really appreciate the opportunities that it's given me as a school. So, that was kind of my experiences working here... and phenomenal colleagues. I have some friends that work at other universities and they get paid a lot more and they- it's a little bit more of a prestigious job and they can't stand the people. The people they work with are not nice and I'm like, I have phenomenal colleagues and you can't put a price on that so, I really enjoy working here.

SB: Wonderful.

MP: Okay.

SB: Thank you for your time

Group: Thank you.

MP: Okay.