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Christopher Mansayon Interview 2020

Michaela Yonkman
Western Oregon University, myonkman16@wou.edu

Michaelyn Morgan
Western Oregon University, mmorgan11@wou.edu

Orlando Medina
Western Oregon University, omedina19@wou.edu

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Professor Christopher Mansayon
Reference Services and Exhibits
Hamersly Library
Western Oregon University
February 5, 2020



Christopher Mansayon Interview

CM: Christopher Mansayon

OM: Orlando Medina

MY: Michaela Yonkman

MM: Michaelyn Morgan

Orlando Medina: Today is February 5th, we are in Hamersly 107. I'm here with Professor Mansayon. How are you doing today?

Christopher Mansayon: Pretty good.[both laugh] End of the day.

OM: When did you start working at Western?

CM: So I came here in May, 2013, as classified staff member.

OM: What were the circumstances that led you to come work at Western?

CM: So I- I'm originally from Idaho and what led me out here is that once I finished my graduate degree in Library Science, I needed a job, and I'm also a member of The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which is located just up the road about 45 minutes here. And, after- well about three or four months into my job search, and they [Western Oregon] came up with a position for a Library Assistant, which is part-time, but I figured being a tribal member, I'd probably have a pretty good chance of at least getting to an interview, which was more than I had gotten as a postgraduate in Idaho, and so I applied for it, interviewed, ended up getting it, came out here and worked that job for just a little bit under a year. Like I said I was a postgraduate so I really just needed a job and it paid pretty well for being part time work but after the first six months, you know your student bills start rolling in for tuition and your loans, and then all of a sudden it's like well it's a part time job, it isn't cutting it so I needed a full time job. And so I started looking and they had just posted a job here, at Western, so same process, applied for it, managed to get it, thankfully, here I am. So, that's what led me here. [Both laugh]

OM: I'm glad you're here [All laugh]. And, have you had any different positions here? And if so, what were they?

CM: Like I said when I- My first position here was a classified staff member, so Library Technician Three, and my duty was to be the information and reference services assistant, so directly assisting the Public Services Librarian and day-to-day operations, supervising the students, stuff like that. So just kind of being out here in the public a lot. And then, in 2018, October, my position was rolled over to a faculty position, and I took on some additional duties that- The opportunity came up because we had some staff retire. Our University Archivist and Exhibit's Coordinator retired and those two jobs split off and I picked up the exhibits portion of it, and my position was converted to a faculty. So, in addition to those three things, now as a faculty member librarian, I also do a lot of liaison work with programs so I have information- no, what is that programs, Interdisciplinary Studies- So I have Interdisciplinary Studies program, the new Liberal Studies program for transfer students, and the new graduate Organizational Leadership program. That's what I do now. So I've had that now for a little over a year, almost a year and a half.

Michaela Yonkman: What is the basis for your job at Western? What kinds of work do you do?

CM: My day-to-day stuff kind of changes as the term progresses. My regular day-to-day is going to be supervision of the Information and Reference Desk, which that entails – so I myself - I supervise a team of anywhere between five and seven student employees, and my own five to seven because sometimes students want a bunch of hours, sometimes students only want to work five hours. So I supervise and train those students daily, and then because I am sort of a public services liaison, I am out at the desk between 12 and 15 or 18 hours a week, so I am actually physically up front quite a bit, providing reference services and then just supervision to the Information Services employees. When I'm not up there, I do a little bit of the exhibits work planning, so I work a lot with Paula Booth over at the Cannon Art Gallery. Sometimes outside entities like Kim [Professor Jensen]. We just had a celebration of the 19th Amendment right here in the lobby, just a little pop-up art exhibit. So I do a little bit of that. I also maintain our monthly rotating book displays. That doesn't take up as much time but it's part of my typical duties. At

the beginning of the term a lot of what I do is basic putting out small fires, because if it's fall we got a lot of new freshman and they just want to know how to print things. We get a lot of surprisingly what you think of as basic questions; "Am I allowed to use the computers in here?" Well yeah you paid for it, yes you can use the computers in here. Or how to check out or how do you print, stuff like that. As the term- so we're around- right now in the term we're week five, everyone is starting to get into their research projects, so we start to get a bit more intense questions. I'll start getting some more reference questions that take 30, 35 minutes, maybe an hour, depending on the nature of it. The printer questions kind of go down a little bit. And then as - well in the next coming week, the research related questions sort of ramp up, and in probably around week eight we get our procrastinator researchers that need things for their assignments and they need them right now. We do our best to accommodate that. Week ten and eleven, surprisingly it goes back to people asking, "How can I print?" and, "Why isn't this working?" It's sort of like an interesting bell curve where in the beginning it's all people asking about how to use the computers and the printers, in the middle it's research, at the end it's those same students that have run into a technical issue and they're, "Oh my God, how do I print? I can't print! What's wrong with the computer! I can't use the computer!" It's a pretty typical term long curve.

MY: What is a typical work day like for you?

CM: A lot of that depends on where we are in the term, but there are some consistencies. Obviously I'm always checking in on student employees up front to make sure that they're okay, that they know what's going on because we do have day-to-day operations, but then we have special events, certain things that the front desk employees need to be aware of. So if I've been in contact with Computing Services and they say we're going to have a server outage today at 10 am for some issue, I want to make sure that the employees at the front know that because they're going to get a lot of questions from the students and I try to disseminate information throughout the building. Usually, in addition to making sure that they know what's going on, I'll check in with them to see if there is anything they need to share with me that's work related. Sometimes it's scheduling related, but mostly work related issues, like if they've been running into any issues, if they've had a lot of people coming up and saying, "Hey, I can't log on to the computer"

and maybe that's something I need to report to UCS [University Computing Services] because I do a lot of technology assistance, liaison work with them, sort of their point of contact person for a lot of that stuff. That's sort of the intro of everyday. You come in, see how things are going. Then, depending on the day, like I said, I might be on the desk for several hours. Usually there will be gaps in between. I also schedule the other librarians and the library staff, so I'm not up there all the time, but I want to share the same type of information with them as well. If I'm not on the desk usually I'm just in the office responding to emails, working on special projects, stuff like that. What else would be in a typical day? Usually at least on run to the coffee shop. One of the interesting things about this job is that there are some components of a typical day that make it fairly routine, but on the other hand, on any given day, I have no idea what to expect when I walk in here. It could just be a very slow, content day, you know, the sun came out that day and it's pretty quiet. Or you could come in, expect it to be a good day, and you come and it's like everything is on fire, the world is going to end, everything is broken and everybody is panicking, that type of thing. That's probably about as far as I could go for a typical day. Everything else is kind of one-off, like the printer is not working today, or something like that.

Michaelyn Morgan: What is the most interesting experience you've had while working at Western?

CM: So, when I read this question, I had to think about what you guys meant by this question because—interesting--by interesting do you mean interesting positive or just interesting in general?

OM: How about one of each.

CM: One of each? Sure. So, let's go with interesting for the sake of interesting first. Some of the most interesting things that I have, and it's actually one of the perks of the job, is that I am up front a lot. So, I'm interacting with the students and staff who come in and out of the building every day and, you know, some people just have very interesting lives, or they have something very interesting going on right now. So, and like I said I help the students a lot, especially with technical issues. And so, some of the more interesting experiences I've had long term have just

been students who get themselves in a bind. Like, they've been working on a paper for eight hours, somehow, they've never saved it during this eight hours. . .

OM: [Laughs]

CM: . . .and by some stroke of fate or whatever. Maybe there was a momentary electrical outage or who knows what. Maybe they've accidentally hit the power button. But they've closed the program, they've logged out accidentally, the program froze, it's due by noon tomorrow, and it's, like, 11:30 at night or something. Those people—they obviously really panic. Some of them handle it better than others. Everybody panics, but some people panic more than others. I've had, like, very angry people. They're not angry at you, they're just angry in general because they've spent a majority of the day doing this and they're afraid that it's all lost. I've had patrons just break down sobbing because that moment just broke them. And, so, one of the more interesting experiences is that, a lot of times, we can rescue those people. We can recover the document that they've lost. We can find where the autosave feature is and we can pull up their 20 page document and, obviously, their day is saved. They're so happy. But it's just really interesting to see those such extreme mood changes, from like, I mean, the pits of Hell to oh my God, you're my savior. And I've actually – over the years I've actually had students that will remember me, like, I helped them save a document once. I don't remember their name, I may recognize their face, but it's from then on every time they're in the library and I'm working on the front they're like, "Oh hi, hey, how are you doing? I want to keep on that guy's good side." So that's one, like, for the sake of interesting experiences.

Another one is that especially when we now get into what they call prep-week (it used to be dead week) and finals week, we obviously have the same environment. There are a ton of people working in here. Some of them procrastinating a bit more than others. Some of them more at their wit's end than others. And we have encountered some, like, very strange situations. For example, we've had patrons pass out before because they had too much caffeine or too many Red Bulls and they just – system overloaded, and they just pass out. And we had to call public safety and you're worried for them. It's just completely unexpected. You just -- sometimes you just never know what you're going to get in that heat of the end of the term moment. So, sometimes, it's that. We just have a lot of interesting, quote, unquote, experiences.

Some positive interesting experiences? Working with the student employees is definitely, like, my positive interesting experience because you really get to know the student employees. I'm their supervisor, but at the same time, they're students and we're not, like, a corporate environment. The library, especially, we take more of, like, a family approach to things. And so, the staff all get to know the student employees and the student employees get to know all the various staffs and we get to just hear about their lives and what they're doing and, obviously, we want to help them, but you're all college students. You all lead very interesting lives and I, as a college student, once lived also, but it's just great hearing about it from students and sort of be a third party to drama sometimes. Hearing it, it just brightens your day. You're like, I'm glad I don't have to do that anymore.

Other interesting experiences? I've had multiple staff and student employees tell me that in the summer, the main hallway on the third floor in one specific spot smells like fish sticks. Every summer. I have never smelled this. I have walked that hall dozens, if not hundreds of times. Sometimes purposely trying to find out this place that they claim smells like fish. I have never, never found it. But I've had multiple, completely unrelated, student employees. So, it's not like their jobs overlapped and a senior student employee was like, "Oh, by the way, the third floor smells like fish in the summer." No. It's been, like – I had a student employee say that, and then two years later another student employee is like, "did you know that the third floor smells like fish sticks in August?" [All laugh]

We don't have this anymore but one of the sort of quirky interesting things is that – so we have a loading dock at the back of the library and there's a phone back there because we get deliveries and so when the delivery drivers would arrive, they'd pick up the phone and it would dial up to the front desk and we've got the little – what do you call it? – caller ID displays. So, it would say "loading dock." It used to be that 12:15, maybe 12:20 every single night, the front desk phone would ring, and it would say "loading dock."

MY: [Laughs]

CM: But nobody was there. So, we used to refer to it as "the loading dock ghost," we used to try to freak out new student employees, like, don't be afraid if the loading dock ghost calls you, because it would always happen at just after midnight and they're closing, they're trying to get

everything closed up, and all of a sudden the phone would ring. Just the same time every single night and it would freak some people out. We don't have that problem anymore, but it was sort of a fun little interesting quirk of the job.

OM: That's freaky.

CM: Yeah, some people were really freaked out by it, but ever since we got the coffee shop in, we got a more advanced phone so that they can either call us or they can call the coffee shop depending on the delivery. So, the loading dock ghost went away unfortunately.

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

CM: So personally, my goal for now and in the future is to finish my doctorate degree. I'm pursuing a doctorate of education at Oregon State [University]. I've finished my two years of course work and now I'm sort of in the middle for my committee doing my preliminary exams before I can actually start to work on my dissertation. And so, personally, that's my plan for-let's be honest the near and probably long-time future, it takes a long time to finish those things up. And then, I also want to continue to serve in various on-campus and off-campus committees like I do right now. I'm fairly involved extracurricular wise in some off-campus organizations, so I'm a board member right now for the Oregon Indian Education Association as well as the State of Oregon Advisory Committee for American Indian and Alaskan Native, and now Native Hawaiian Education. Previously, I worked on the College Research Libraries board for the state of Oregon so I like to be very involved in sort of that state level activities so I would like to continue to do that. But professionally there's still some things on-campus that I haven't yet been involved in, that still really intrigue me so- I have never had the opportunity to serve on, I believe they're called the Alternative Breaks, or the Service Breaks, where they- where students will go to like a California or Mexico or Idaho or something like that for a week and do as a alternative- For staff and faculty there's typically the opportunity to serve as an advisor that goes along with them and sort of, you know, helps corral . . .

[Camera Battery Died]

OM: [Laughter] Alright.

CM: So, from a professional standpoint, I'd like to keep growing in my current position because I've said I've had it for just over a year and it's not really an established position, like I was it taking over from somebody who had already set the foundation for everything and I can just kinda step in and just keep the vehicle moving. So right now I'm just kind of trying to get faculty to my side and claw my way up and get their attention so I can start laying that foundation. One of the things- one of the unique aspects of my liaison work is that I am a liaison for specific programs, not necessarily departments like Criminal Justice, History, stuff like that, and so I have a better opportunity to do what the profession calls taking an embedded approach, which means that the librarian sort of acts as a quasi-faculty member in the program itself, and so where a lot of student experience with faculty librarians are limited to what we would also call a one-shot instruction, so you took your writing class and you had a librarian come in and say "okay here's how to use the databases" and they- you had them for like 45 minutes or 50 minutes or something, we call that a one-shot, and then by happen chance you might get to ask them a question when they're working up at the front desk or you just ask whoever is working at the front desk any of your follow up questions. So, you get maybe an initial meeting with a librarian, but you don't necessarily get a long-term relationship with them type thing. For myself, in a program, from a specific program standpoint, if you can get embedded early on into the program and establish that relationship with the students and the students know that you're their librarian, then they know they have somebody that they can contact any time they have a reference question. You make it known that, sure, "You can go up to the front desk and ask whatever you want, but I'm your program librarian. If you have questions, feel free to ask me." It doesn't have to be research related. It could just be like, "How do I reserve a room," because I help people with that all the time. Or, it could be research-related, or it could be helping you sort of get the ball rolling of what your eventual capstone project is going to be. So, if I can make that foundation with an embedded librarianship approach, hopefully that's something that would create waves and push outwards eventually, where other librarians could then say, "Hey, look at what he's doing in this program, let's scaffold how your classes are, and see where would the best point to get a single librarian in be." And have that librarian follow those students through to

their degree completion. It's the same thing with Interdisciplinary Studies and the Liberal Studies programs, more so the Liberal Studies right now because they actually have, there's a course called LS 300 that's meant for incoming transfer students that is a more advanced version of what you would get, like a freshman orientation, it's like this is your class to help you get accustomed to the campus, to resources, and to the rest of your program. So, if you can get established there, then you've got another two years' worth of specific students and you can help them on that long journey. I would like to achieve that before I move on. I would like to achieve some type of embedded foundation that other librarians can build upon in the future.

OM: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences working here?

CM: No, I don't think so. I don't have anything specific to add. When I was reviewing the question, I didn't write anything down because I didn't know, I didn't want to take up too much of your time. [Laughter] Because when you get in these interviews time flies really quickly, like "Oh my gosh, it's been 45 minutes." But if you guys have any other questions for me I will try to answer them the best I can.

MY: I think that was everything.

OM: I do apologize but I remembered that I did not introduce ourselves. [Laughter]. I am Orlando Medina.

MY: I am Michaela Yonkman.

MM: I am Michaelyn Morgan.

OM: All right. Thank you for your time, Mr. Mansayan. It was amazing getting to know you and knowing your plans and I hope you achieve them.

CM: Thank you. And I think it's great that you guys are doing this. Oral histories are really

important and I know how passionate Kim [Professor Jensen] is about history. And I hope she successfully gets to impart that on the three of you. I'm sure she tries! [Laughter] She's very involved, especially with the library, so, we like to do anything we can for her.

MY: Thank you so much.

MM: Thank you.

CM: It was great to meet the three of you.