



WOU Beth Scroggins Interview Transcript

Interviewers: Julian Elizalde (JE), Richard Lewis (RL), Joey Sinclair (JS).

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JE: Alright so thanks for working with us and...

BS: Thank you, no problem. I appreciate the flexibility.

JE: I'm Julian as you probably know from my zoom name and we're doing an interview for our history class or oral history class we're gonna ask you four questions which may come with follow up questions depending on how it's going, so the first question I have for you is when did you start working at western what were the circumstances that led you to come to work at western and have you had different positions here.

BS: So good! So I've been here since September of 2015 and I was, I'm from Arkansas originally but I moved here from Louisiana and what landed me here was that my partner and I were just looking for different jobs to get out of the South and some of the things that were going on there and so we wanted something that just the community that is more inclusive and so we looked at different job positions and kind of narrowed down places, applied to western and it's the one that we got, both of us so so really it was just kind of a blessing how everything worked out you know, uprooted the family we have two kids and came out here and haven't looked back, haven't regretted a thing.

So I started in September 2015 as a counselor in the student health and counseling center and worked there well I'm still working there but I changed positions to become director about two years ago and that was a it was a job that I was looking forward to but I was so afraid of the interview process that that I put it off and put it off and finally just bit the bullet and did it so anyway and I'm glad I did 'cause it's the best best absolutely best job in the world.

JE: Awesome. Is there like a different position you can see yourself at western like in the long run?

BS: In the— You know honestly I have thought about that mostly because I had started years ago I had started my PhD in higher education and then had to quit that and when I say a long time ago it was like probably 17 years ago it was a long time ago and so I'm like do I wanna pick that back up and maybe pursue something are up the chain of administration in in the answer goes back and forth sometimes it's yes and most of the time it's it's no there's so much more I want to do with where I am now student health and counseling and this COVID mess you know has put a stop to so many things so I feel behind in my professional goals just for that one clinic so if I were to do anything different have a moving up it would be could be years years years from now like 5-10 years from now but there's just not a day that I haven't enjoyed going into work so but I'm pretty satisfied with where I am and what I still I know I know in my mind what I still need to accomplish to make it grow and better for the students.

JE: That's good for the first question for me so thank you

BS: you're welcome

RL: Hi my name is Richard, Richard Lewis so you've already told us the basis of your job at Western but could you give us some more examples of the kinds of work you do and what a typical work day for you is like?

BS: Yeah there's— It's amazing to me how many meetings can be scheduled in a day. And when they're productive and things get done and decided I love it. But when people are meeting just to meet and talk about things and not make decisions it can get pretty frustrating. So a lot of meetings and the things that I like most of all though are the meetings within our department; So within student health and counseling.

So once a week there's a meeting for just all the counselors to get in staff. There's a meeting for the counselors in the medical providers to get together in staff. There's an all staff meeting. And then just a director's meeting and it just keeps all the pieces of communication and operations open for everybody. I mean, I have a meeting with the front office staff. So meetings, a lot of emails, and right now (especially around this time of year) budget is a big thing. And when I say budget, it's a very long process, so it takes up a lot of work from about March through June, you know. There's just a lot going on with budget stuff. And I think those are typical duties, you know, of many directors. Things that do outside of that are, well— Part of the reopening committee and honest workplace safety committee additional committees related to COVID and having the school open up safely so a lot of that a lot of communication with Polk county and with Oregon health authority, things like that outside of WOU, to keep our practice (Student Health and Counseling) in compliance and making sure we can offer what we can to help with that. And then I answer student emails (a lot of those) with questions or concerns or sending in documents. Things like that.

And really right now just planning on how things are going to look once we open in the fall. There's still some questions that I have about what we're going to do in the Fall and I'm hoping it's wide open. But just really— I really kind of feel like (especially now) there's just kind

of always prepared for any scenario and so I find a lot of— I spend a lot of time planning (if this then that; if this then that) and I do have a lot of spreadsheets [and] a lot of data so that I can pretty much shift with whatever we need to do and make a decision based on numbers really, you know, and feedback from others.

RL: Nice! Well, thank you.

JS: Hi my name's Joey Sinclair I'm also going to ask you a couple questions and so since you've been at WOU what would you say is the most interesting experience in any position you never one or your older one?

BS: I think the most interesting experience, honestly, has been with just WOU as a whole. And that has been with the openness of diversity and the inclusion aspect— which, of course was what we're looking for but you never know what you're gonna get 'til you land somewhere, right? And— 'cause people can have words on their website and say words in an interview. But, just all the resources available really blows me away. And I'm part of the care team; we have that set up and, like, whoever reports a student that's maybe in distress, there are people that follow up with that student to help them to [kinda wrap around services?]. That's been the best thing. One of the— Some of the people I think don't realize, as far as the student health and counseling center typically, is even before Covid the amount of anxiety and depression (mostly anxiety) in our students— and also, this is the prime age for a first psychotic break and so we see more than that, I think, when people would think. So like, while that's not, like, interesting and, like, "Ooh this is interesting!", it is interesting because it's not something that people think about and hopefully not something most people have to worry about. But, it is interesting that it typically happens in this age group. And so we're kind of on the front lines of many harsh breaks like that.

JS: And do you think Covid has something to do with that last part you were talking about? About the students being in distress? Like, do you think since then, more students have been in contact with you about that?

BS: Yeah. We have seen— So, because of the way the structure's set up, we're not seeing as many students because of the fee. And since everything's online, students have to opt in to pay the fee. Whereas normally, it's automatically assessed [and] nobody thinks about it. So it's really brought attention to that (some negatively; some positively) and I like it all because it gives us a chance to talk to different populations about that. But the students that we see are struggling. It's the isolation. It's the isolation they are having a hard time with. Because, even before, somebody was havin' a bad day, you know, having a depressive episode, they had their peers to connect with. You know, they could go and do something with other people. And now they're just kinda suffering silently alone. And so, in the online classes, while it benefits some people and that's great and there'll continue to be that opportunity, most people, well, that I have heard of, are just dropping out and waiting until things get back online¹ because it is so difficult for so many people. But yeah, we have definitely seen the struggle. And [of] everything that Covid has changed, it's the isolation that has been the most detrimental.

JS: Awesome. Thank you for sharing that. You already kinda touched on Covid and how it affects ____ ____ (everything regarding) your work. Besides Covid, what would you say, since you've been at WOU, has been the toughest obstacle you had to get passed?

BS: That me personally I've had to get passed?

JS: Yeah. You personally.

¹ Perhaps she meant "back on campus."

BS: So, honestly... I'll answer honestly. I'm pretty impatient. And so when I want something done, the waiting (the waiting on permission or the waiting to do the presentation) the waiting; that's the most frustrating thing. [laughs] ____ ____ ____ [I mean it to you like this] I've been at [an]other university and it's just the way it is, I think. But sometimes, I think sometimes all the rules and protocols and procedures can get in the way of doing work. So that's the most frustrating. Sometimes I just like to go and do. And if it didn't work, then just do something different. And if that didn't work, try something different again. That's kinda how I operate things and I encourage my staff to. If you have ideas, let's try it. If it didn't work, okay! If it does work, that's fabulous! So, just havin' that flexibility — and all the rules and protocols are there for a reason and I do appreciate that. 'Cause I am very much a rule follower. But as far as the overall, I just get impatient. I get impatient on doing what I wanna do when I wanna do it.

JS: I understand that for sure. Thank you for sharing that.

JE: Alright. And I have your final question. So what are your plans and goals at Western now and for the future?

BS: My plans and goals are to be where I am, at Student Health and Counseling, doing what I'm doing. And really, while so many detrimental things have happened because of Covid and, you know, laid off so many people, the thing I'm looking most forward to is rebuilding some of the things that we lost. And rebuilding not to be like they were, necessarily. And I am speaking specifically about our Health Promotion Department which is wiped out. So I'm already planning and have a data sheet on things that I want it to look like which is gonna be bigger and broader and [have] more social media involvement and more campus-wide involvement.

So I'm excited about those kinds of things that I can bring back once we get up and going again. And I expect it'll take a year. Hopefully not that long, but reasonably a year. And I'm curious to see how we do in the future and see what—I've started back SHAC, which is the Student Health Advisory Committee. And I'll be sending some stuff out about that later in the term but it's a committee for Student Health and Counseling Center of students that I'll make reports to but then they give feedback and information on where they want to see the Student Health Center go; so [from] the student perspective. So, that's kinda been non-existent in the past few years so I'm really excited to bring that back.

I do have a couple of students helping work with updating some paperwork that was pretty outdated; application stuff and bylaws. More student voices is what I want. So that's another of my goals is to bring that more fully back into the package of Student Health and Counseling. And really just continue to educate myself. We can all (I do) get in a rut and just things are going along so we just kinda go along. But to continue to educate myself, and research other universities. what can we do better? What can we do differently? What are the other ones doing? How's it working? And I'm on some licenses that give me that opportunity. And of course I still am a licensed professional counselor so I do keep up on, cause I have to by law, my licensure requirements to keep up with counseling education classes, and things like that. So I just, I'm so hopeful for the future, and I think I just have to be, cause I can't imagine, I don't want to think; I'm in denial about what it could be if things don't get better. So I choose to be hopeful, and I'm excited about what more we can do.

JE: What else would you like to add about your experiences working, if there is anything?

BS: I just, I love it. You know I'm involved in some search committees for different departments [laughs] and you know one question that candidates typically ask is, "How do you feel about WOU?" I'm always (well, not always.) but most of the time I say "I love WOU, I love Western, I love the size, I love everything, everything about it; the students; And I've got a wonderful boss. So to me, administration is great and supportive. Even though they maybe aren't as fast as I'd want them to be sometimes. You know, it's great.

While I'd like to say there's just nothing wrong with WOU, of course there would be some things (right) that can be changed; because, if not that means you're stagnant. If there's nothing to ever improve, then that means it's time to do something else to me. So I think there can be a lot of improvement in different areas, and I'd like to be a part of those. Either through more meetings and committees or through SHACK, or through whatever, I hate to use the word power, but you know, power, privilege that I have. I just love it. I'm tickled to be here, and I just don't see myself anywhere else, I really don't. It sounds so cliché and I hate to say it cause it sounds so corny, but (yeah no) I actually plan to retire here, but that's a long way off, I hope.

JS: So you said that you came from the south, do you think you can touch on that adjustment? Coming from the south then to Oregon, I'm sure there's a lot of differences probably.

BS: Yeah, it was a huge culture shock; wow it was a huge culture shock. And there's some things I miss. I'll tell you the food in the south beats the food here every which way. I miss the food, I mean the food is good. And people there, they share their opinions and people can disagree and they go on. So there's not this hurt feelings or being protective of what you say. You're not going to offend somebody down there, so it's really just kind of open. What you see is what you get, what we say is what we say, that kind of thing. I've had to learn to choose words more carefully, and I think people are so nice here that it is hard to debate anything. Sometimes just a good debate, purposeful debate, so let's pick something we disagree on and debate it. Not argue it, but just debate it and hear each other. I just worry, sometimes that's missing. I think people are afraid of upsetting somebody or people getting mad, and my thing is it's ok to be mad. If you go through life without ever getting mad, where's the growth, and the strength?

Also, and I'll give you an example. We had cut some limbs here at the property, and I was hauling them down to the burnpile. We had a big burn pile, and I walked up to it and was throwing the limbs on it. I'm like "oh my gosh I didn't even think about snakes". Cause down in the south you can't walk out your door without looking for a snake or fire ants. Something's going to kill you or try to kill you [laughs, at all times. So here it's kind of like the Garden of Eden, is what I kind of compare it to. There's no snakes, no insects, or animal that's going to come attack you in your backyard. So it is nice not to have to live under that stress, which you don't even realize you're living under until you're out from under it.

And of course I miss my family. My family is still down there. I'll tell you, even with what I said earlier about watching what you say, and things like that; I have grown so much as a person; So much *more* as a person, being here than I did there. Because there, all you knew is what you were raised around, and most people don't get out of that. So I think unless you can live in other places, you can see where my shallowness was, or where my weaknesses were, or how I thought I was so insightful and so open. Then like wow, there's so much more to people, to society, to life, than what there was in that little place. And it's funny, because when I do talk to family and friends back there, I'm just cringing, like "Oh my God you did not just say that!" [laughs], like oh my goodness [laughs]. I want to say "you can't say things like that, that's so inappropriate". So I have really, and I think of myself as a very go with it kind of person, but I do realize, especially compared to when I talk to people back home, how much I have grown, just in the few years I have been here. And I want to keep that part going too.

And I do want to apologize about my appearance, I know I don't look professional. I had told Julian I had surgery just a few days ago, so I'm still recuperating. So I just put a hat on, to cover cause my hair is everywhere, so anyways. [laughs]

JE: It's totally fine

RL: Yeah no worries!

That's why I'm wearing a beanie.

JE: We're just happy you were able to show up, so appearance isn't really an issue.

So, does anyone else have any more questions?

RL: No. I just wanted to say thank you for everything you do, and for all your service. And for being open and sharing your story with us.

JE: Absolutely, you're welcome! Thanks for the excellent questions.

RL: Our pleasure!