

Jeanne Rockwell-Kincanon WOU Interview Transcript, May 5, 2021

Interviewers: Daniel Avendano (DA), Matthew Williams (MW), Jackson Beeler (JB), and Josiah Liljequist (JL).

Interviewee: Jeanne Rockwell-Kincanon (JRK)

Transcribed and edited by Daniel Avendano, Matthew Williams, Jackson Beeler, and Josiah Liljequist.

MW: Recording right now.

JL: Appreciate it. Right now, we're doing an interview for Oral History 408. The date is May 5th, 2021. We're on a Wednesday. I'm one of the interviewers, I'm Josiah Liljequist and my fellow interviewers are Jackson Beeler, Matt Williams, and Daniel, and our interviewee is Jeanne Rockwell-Canon, I believe.

JRK: Kincanon.

JL: Kincanon, sorry about that. We're gonna ask her a few questions. I will go first. When did you start working at Western?

JRK: I started in 1998, August 17th.

JL: What were the circumstances that led you to come to work at Western? How did you [Inaudible]

JRK: I had just finished my graduate degree in Library and Information Sciences at the University of Illinois. I was doing a national search for a job. I found this position out here and interviewed in May and it was a really great fit for me. I was right out of graduate school.

JL: [Inaudible] Illinois?

JRK: Say that again please.

JL: You said you were from Illinois?

JRK: I did my graduate degree in library school in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, but I'm not from Illinois. I am a Midwestern girl. I grew up in Iowa and went to undergraduate at Wayne State College in Nebraska which is quite similar to Western. It's a former teacher's school, but now comprehensive. So that was part of the attraction of Western, it's similarly focused and a similar type of student to the one that I experienced as an undergraduate. Moved across the country for the position.

JL: You said it was pretty similar, so no really culture shock or anything like that with coming over to the West Coast? How would you say the transition was?

JRK: Great question. It's hard to thread out what was, because it was the first time that my husband and I had not been in an educational program. And what was just culture, different culture from the Midwest. In the Midwest, people tend to talk to strangers, kind of like you know, shoot the breeze in grocery store lines. I remember being like "oh, people don't do that here." [Laughs] So there was a little bit of culture shock there and then I remember being really lonely the first year that I was out here. When you're in school, you have a built in community of your classmates or your residence hall folks. We didn't have that for the first time, and I was also one of the first faculty members of a new generation to come in. I was way younger than most of my new colleagues. I just remember being just really lonely until more young faculty started to come in, and had a chance to meet them. Does that answer your question?

JL: Yeah, that was perfect, that was great. Have you had different positions here or just one?

JRK: The job that I was hired into- I've always been in the library. But the job that I was hired into was an instruction librarian, so my primary focus there was to teach the classes, the research

skills classes that various faculty would bring their classes into the library to learn how to do research in whatever they were teaching. Lot of writing, writing one hundred level classes that was like teaching the first year research paper project. Lot of English literature classes, that kind of thing. Speech and writing were what I did a lot of classes for. I did that for- that was my primary role for about five years, and then I had a colleague who retired and I ended up- I decided I wanted to move in a different direction so at that time I'd moved into the Public Services Librarian. So that I teach a lot less, but I'm in charge of all of the activity that students are very intentional about using. So the reference and information desk and the checkout desk, borrowing materials, that kind of thing. So all of that- very operational kinds of activity are my purview of the library. I am not a backend, backroom kind of person who catalogues the books and makes the websites run. I can do web stuff, but I'm not terribly great at it and we have other people who do that kind of work. I'm more of the public face of the library and a lot of the public interaction.

JL: Thank you for that. Jackson, if you want to ask the second set of questions there.

JB: What is your basis for your job at Western?

JRK: What do you mean?

JB: Would you be able to give us some examples of what kind of work you do? Like a typical work day?

JRK: Hm. Well one of the things that I love about my job is that I have a lot of variety. So, a typical workday, meh. I will have, okay a typical workday might be a couple of hours – and I'm going to try and think back to pre-Covid because it changed a lot, right? I might have a few hours where I am out at the public desk, at the reference desk, so handling questions as people come into the building and need help finding research, understanding policies and you know, just any

kind of help that they need with either research or technology or that kind of thing. And then so I'll have a couple hours doing that and then a lot of the time that I'm not out in the public area, I'm working on developing tools that help us reach more students, so one of the things – we've had this for a while now, but one of the things was I developed the chat program that we have, so on our website there is a little anonymous chat widget and so I got that setup and running, and I kept that – all of the public-facing employees at the library have accounts on that system, and then actually after Covid hit, Last spring term we suddenly had all of these campus departments who needed a way to interact with students, right? And the tool that we use for that chat, we pay a small subscription for that, and we can share that subscription with other departments on campus, so a lot of my work last spring was developing all of the separate queues so that the Registrar could have a chat window and if a student – if Jackson went onto the Registrar's page and started typing in their little box it would go to the right people, right? So, lots of behind-the-scenes stuff in order to make things more accessible to students. So yeah, and then in the summer as we moved toward fall term, A lot of my work was reimagining what the library was going to look like operationally. Because we had shut down, we had closed the building although we were still serving people, we had very small staff in the building. And we knew we wanted to open the building for the fall term and so a lot of my summer was working out the details of what that looked like, and the functionality of like “okay we need a system for contact tracing” and setting all that up. So, a lot of the infrastructure that's needed, those are a couple examples of the infrastructure that I am in charge of. And I don't necessarily do all of the infrastructure work myself, but I coordinate that, and I get the right people together and manage the whole process. I am very operational-focused.

JB: Okay, I think we're good to move on to question 3 now.

DA: What is the most interesting experience you've had while working at Western? And how has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the nature of your work at WOU?

JRK: Okay, those are two different questions. The first question is: what was the most interesting experience?

DA: Yeah, what is the most interesting experience you have had while working at Western?

JRK: It's a good question. Maybe uniquely, I answered the first question from Josiah, when I started at Western I gave a specific date. The reason that I remember that date very -not just August but I remember it was August 17th. That was the day that we broke ground ceremonially for the Hamersly Library, and so my first two years of work, the library was still in what is now the APSC building; that was the library. I started the job knowing that we were going to have a beautiful new building, so I guess I was kind of lucky in that I didn't have to go through the hard work prior to that of convincing people. Not that it would have been my job anyway to convince people that we needed a new building, but I knew from the start that we were getting this brand new building. And that two years- and actually the first full year that we were open -that was a lot of work. Prepping, knowing how we were going to- moving the collection that was maybe pictorially interesting, visually interesting, but also kind of easy. [Laughs] That was just a physical thing, but it was much more like: okay, we're reimagining our services in this new building, staffing it out. Then that first- at least the first full year of being in this nice, beautiful, new space. There was a lot of things to learn. So that's unique to have that opportunity. I don't know that that was the most fulfilling, but it was interesting. My most fulfilling [opportunity] is honestly working with students. I gather a lot of personal energy from working with students. I'm saying that your question was: what was the most interesting thing? So I'm talking about working with students over the broad 20 years. Not one specific instance, but that's the most fulfilling piece of my job is to work directly with students. Does that answer your question,

Daniel?

DA: Yeah, and if there is any memorable moments that you've shared with a student; if you are more than comfortable to share with us, that would be greatly appreciated.

JRK: I'm thinking of a funny situation but I'm also thinking of this situation as what I like to see. I don't know if any of you have ever used microfilm? Does that ring a bell for anyone?

MW: A little bit.

JRK: Okay. It was a format that we used prior to the internet age. When things came out digitally. If you had a lot of- we still have a lot of newspapers that are in microformat, in these cabinets. They're teeny tiny little pictures on this film, so if you unroll the film you can see there's these tiny little pictures and you can see tiny little lines of print on them. You can kind of see that it's in the format of a newspaper, but you can't read it with just your eyes. I remember a student who- and this was years ago. This newspaper- whatever we were talking about- is on microfilm and she said, "Oh, I can't use microfilm." I was thinking, "Oh, she's got a visual disability," but that didn't make sense, she was sitting in front of a computer and having no problems whatsoever seeing the computer and I was like, "Do you know that there's a machine that we use in order to blow up the image of the microfilm." And she said, "There is?" She thought that some students, apparently, could take this tiny little film and read it. That's like my funny story that I always keep close to my heart, but it also tells the story of making things clear to people. People don't know things until they know them and that's what I love about working in a university. Where that's why we're here: is to learn things. I love- even though that was a very technology-centric kind of surprise to her- I loved the sensation of making that a known thing to her. Does that make sense?

DA: Yeah, and I guess the second question of ---- ---- [this part?] is: since you've had these experiences and connections with students, how has Covid-19 pandemic affected the nature of

your work at WOU?

JRK: Yeah, I've been struggling with this actually because, while we still have an open building for the people who are around and who want to come in, it's not the same. It's not like we have lots of people coming in. We've also- one of the other projects that I did was we instigate- we've always had the (well, not always), we've had the chat service for a long time, typing based interaction. But with Covid we introduced a zoom reference service so people could conceivably click on the zoom button from our webpage and have access to a conversation with a librarian. But I think people are just maxed out with what they're trying to do and I think that's true both for students and for the faculty. So the faculty maybe are like "Okay, just do this." [Laughs] Maybe they're not having people do- I don't know really what the faculty and their research requirements are, but I really just miss having people around and- oh, like seeing people in the books area or in the stacks and being able to recognize, "Oh, that person looks lost." Just going over there to them and saying, "Are you finding what you need?" And opening that conversation for them. Right now we're in- with distancing and all remote work, it really requires the student to make that leap into the question and answering. I can't- there's no way for me to scope out people who are remote and saying, "He looks like he's not getting this, can I help him in some way?" So that's what I really miss, does that- did I answer that question?

DA: Yeah, that was a great answer. It really gave perspective to how it affects you.

JRK: And not that it's- it does affect me emotionally, I miss having that interaction with people, but I'm also thinking about students have missed probably a good year of research, or at least library-centric research.

DA: Thank you. I believe that is the end of question 3.

JL: I think Matthew has a question to ask.

MW: What are your plans [and] your goals for western now and what are your goals kind of further off into the future?

JRK: What are my goals for western, and what are my goals for western off into the future, or my goals?

MW: Your goals for western now and into the future? Although you could answer that too.

JRK: Well, the library and academic innovation staff. Just had this morning our strategic planning meeting that we have once a month I think. And so, we are doing some long-term planning, and long term in this case means three years, and it's kind of hard to think three years out, which two years ago wouldn't have seemed like a major vision period. But now with Covid it's like OK, let's just look out to fall of 2021. Let's see what needs to happen before September 30th and looking three years out is just like ugh, that's hard. But- so I guess my immediate goal for Western is to get back to a safe, residential campus and a larger goal would be to continue surveying Oregonians and others who are unrepresented who like a small to medium personalized instructional space, and that means Hispanic, it means gender identity, it means all kinds of just anyone who's part of underrepresented groups particularly. But, Yeah, so. I would say that that's one of our goals as a library is to bring more diversity and equity to how we do our services and how we integrate into the campus that way [inaudible] and support those efforts yeah, I'm not a huge goal person but that's one of the things that we have been talking about.

MW: Is there anything else you'd like to add personally, something you might have felt you wanted to say and didn't get a chance to or, any other questions brought something to mind you'd like to add?

JRK: [Inaudible]

MW: Ok, then that's it for the interview.