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Elizabeth Brookbank Interview 2018

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Jessica Tidwell: JT

Kalea Borling: KB

Carlos Guerrero: CG

Nicholas Howes: NH

Elizabeth Brookbank: EB

Jessica Tidwell: Alright, go.

Kalea Borling: Ok, so...we are here with... Elizabeth Brookbank, and today is October 24th, 2018, and ... we are in Hamersly Library, Room 116.. I am Kalea Borling.

Carlos Guerrero: I'm Carlos Guerrero.

Nick Howes: I'm Nick Howes.

JT: I'm Jessica Tidwell.

KB: And...

Elizabeth Brookbank: Do I do? [overlapping]

JT: Sure, yeah, go ahead.

EB: I'm Elizabeth Brookbank
[laughing]

KB: And let's begin.

CG: All right so, I'm Carlos and I'll be ... asking the first question, [KB: Ok.] So when did you start working at Western [Western Oregon University]?

EB: I started working at Western... in... so I started here in August 2013, so it would have been for the 2013-2014 academic year. Academic years always mess me up a little bit but... yeah... So this is my sixth academic year here.

CG: Hmm. And what were the circumstances that led you to come to work at Western?

EB: Well...I...had just finished my graduate school program in....I just gotten my Masters in Library and Information Science from the University of Washington in Seattle, and, so, I applied

for jobs [collective laughter]. Before graduating, as you do. And applied for a bunch of different jobs,... you know,... a smaller percentage of which I could had some phone interviews for... and one of the jobs that I got an interview for was Western... But it was, you know, part of a process that I was going through looking for jobs. And they offered me the job, and I decided to take it because I wanted to stay in the Pacific Northwest. I would have loved to stay in Seattle--full disclosure [collective laughter]. But it is really hard to get librarian's job in Seattle because the grad program is there, and so every year there are like, a hundred new librarians that really want to live in Seattle. [collective laughter] And so it's very... the competition is stiff up there. But yeah, I was really lucky to get to stay in the Pacific Northwest, and so I packed up and moved down here. Yeah.

CG: Okay.... Have you ever had positions here? If so, what were they?

EB: Nope. I have just done this, this position. I'm an Instruction Librarian. That's my position. My official title is Associate Professor because librarians here are faculty. So my official title is Associate Professor, but my role in the library is an Instruction Librarian; and that's what I got hired for... And I have only just done that. Hopefully, I have gotten better at it over the years, but that has been my job the whole time [laughs] that I have been here.

CG: Jessica.

JT: So what is the basis of your job here at Western?

EB: So, like I said I'm an Instruction Librarian, and what that basically means is that I spend at least half my time, sometimes more, at this time of the term it's more, and at the later parts of the term it's less... but at least overall half my time, teaching. And so, some of you have probably had the experience of a librarian coming into your class and showing your class how to do research for a specific assignment, so I do a lot of that. I also do, every so often, teach, credit-bearing, full class. So, I've taught, you know, like a, Colloquium for the Honors Program; I am actually teaching one of those in the winter. And we have a couple of specific library... like information literacy, research-related classes that we have been able to offer throughout the years at different times, and we are hoping to be able to do that more once there is more room in the curriculum with the new Gen-Ed [General Education] requirements. So, that's... those two types of teaching is the majority of what I do. But then, because we are such a small library, all of the librarians have to wear a lot of different hats. [collective laughter.] So the majority of my job is teaching, and that, you know, a bigger or smaller majority, depending on the time of the term, but then I also am in charge of the library's social media accounts. So, I, that a project that Kalea has been helping me on [chuckle] this term. I, you know, come up with things to post, and then draft the posts, and actually post them on our Facebook page, our Twitter feed, or whatever

you want to call it, and our Instagram profile. And so, I'm in charge of the strategy and sort of the logistics of that.

And, I also am, what else do I do? Oh! Well I sit at the reference desk five or six hours a week. So that I can answer student questions, and help with, you know, any, any needs students have in the library and sort of take turns, sitting at the reference desk. I also managed the recreational collection, and so, I don't know if you guys know, but the library has a collection of books that are for reading for fun, not academic books. [Collective laughter] And I manage that, so I order the books for that from the, you know, vendor that we get those books from, and make displays, and sort of keep it, you know I have little like book reviews tags that I sort of rotate out that, the way you see in bookstores that try to help people decide if they, you know, need help deciding what to read. So I started to manage that whole, collection.

What else do I do? I do other things, but I feel like those are the main things. I also, because I am faculty have... other responsibilities to the campus, outside of the library, so I am on faculty committees, various committees over the years., I'm on, I sort of have that service component like, all the faculty at Western have to... engage in a certain amount of service to the university and to their profession. And so, like, over the years, I've been on various committees on campus, various committees in, sort of, regional and national professional associations for librarians. I also do research and scholarship, so I, you know, design research studies and then write them up. I just recently had a paper published in an academic journal, and I'm currently in the last... phase... of a very long process of publishing a book [laugh] with my mentor at the University of Washington, who I worked with when I was a grad student. We wrote a book together and have been working on, through the process of getting it published for like two years, but it's almost there. And, so I also those response-- ... those like sort of like faculty responsibilities that I do as well. It sounds kind of overwhelming when I say it all at once [laughter], but...

JT: If I could ask, what's your book about? Or, what's it going to be on?

EB: So the book is... we're writing, it's, it's kind of like a research handbook for undergraduate students, it's being published with the MLA, the Modern Language Association. So, the, it's in the Humanities, specifically, like how to sort of organize and plan for, and the research, and write, research papers essentially in the Humanities. And, it's a book that they have had various editions of over the years, but the last edition was published in 2006. So a lot has changed since then, in terms of research and like the types of resources that you would use. There's barely a mention of doing research on the Internet in the last addition. So, there was--it basically was writing it over from scratch as opposed to just updating the edition. But, yeah, it's sort of a... [chuckle] for how much work it's been, it's sort of a slim little handbook that, the idea is that, you know, you could buy it or check it out from the library and be able to, like, flip through it

easily and find you know tips or, you know, guidelines on what you need to... work on your paper. Either, you know, whether you're at, sort of, whether you're at the beginning phase where you are trying to figure out your topic, there is stuff about that. If you're at the phase where you need to figure out what databases to use or how to search them, there's stuff about that. There's stuff about, like, creating your citations and your works cited page, and organizing your references, so it's sort of meant to be a sort of easy handbook that hopefully, people will find useful.

JT: You kind of already answered this but, could you give us some more examples of the kind of work you do here at Western?

EB: Sure! So... yeah, I mean I, I feel like I covered the big areas, but often times when I'm doing interviews like this, a lot of times I talk to peop-- to students who are thinking of becoming librarians, generally English majors, [laugh] who don't know what else they are going to do. Which, I was an English majors, so I am living proof that English majors can get jobs. [Collective laughter]. They'll ask me, like, what a typical day is, and that's pretty hard to answer because it is really different, which is one of the things that I like about my job. But, it sort of depends on the time of the term, so a typical day this week and next week, is I'll have a class or two that I teach. And so, the week be-- you know, the last, the, I usually try to--a week before or a few days before the class I'll sort of prepare for that class. I'll write an outline of what I want to cover, like, you know, print out any handouts that I want to give to the students, or prep in that way, and then I'll teach the class. Today I had a phone call with my co-author, to complain, slash [chuckle], plan on how we are going to address the, like, latest, request and edits that the publisher had from us; and then I came in to do this meeting with you all. And then later on today I have, some hours where I am going to sit on the reference desk.

I should be, pretty soon getting in a shipment of books from the collect-- for the recreation collection, and so I will go through those and, like, when I get them in I have to go into our, sort of, backend system, and indicate where they are: like, whether they are on display or whether they are just on the regular shelf, where all the rest of the recreational books are. And, then I put little stickers on them and put them out there [laugh]. So I'll do that.

Every monday morning, I plan the social media posts for the week. So I'll go though, and I have a calendar where I sort of have ideas of things that I want to talk about at different times of the term. Lately, it's been about, you know: if you need a study break from midterms, here are some things you can do in the library; don't forget about the coffee shop; you know, we are at the reference desk if you need help; like, here are some things you can check out if you need equipment or whatever. So sort of midterm-focused, but then at different times of the term it will be different, you know, during finals week we promote the library's open later, things like

that. so I sort of plan what post I want to do, and then I'll draft the posts... The thing that Kalea has been helping me with is that we do a Throwback Thursday post every Thursday with our Archive images. So she has found me some Archive images and has drafted the post and then I sort of tweak them a little bit and schedule those to go out. So I try to get all the social media posts scheduled on Monday morning, so that then, throughout the week I can, I can, you know, I'll check the profile to see if there is anything I want to re-tweet or share, or comment on or anything. But, I at least know we will have at least one post a day on all the channels so then that I can just through, and you know, do bonus things., You know, add to our story on Instagram or whatever.

I also had some grading to do this week. So, one of the classes that I teach for, the professor and I have worked together for... most of the time that I have been here. And so we have gotten to the point where we have a pretty good, pretty good pattern established where I teach two sessions during the term. And between those two sessions there is an assignment to do an annotated bibliography that the students, you know, they research using the strategies I taught them in the first class. And then they find a resource, and they do an annotation and a citation for it; and I give them feedback on that so that they then can incorporate that into their paper. And then we talk about that in the second session, and, you know, give them time to do more research, so we have a sort of a scaffolded, scaffolded series of things that we do, so but that means that I have to grade the annotated bibliographies when they come in [laugh]. And I actually just finished doing that right before I walked in here [collective laughter]. So that I could get them that feedback today, so that they have enough time to incorporate it before their papers are due next week, so, I also did that. Other things to, I'm sure [laugh], but that gives you an idea. Yeah.

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

EB: Most interesting experience? Hmmm... Well,so the way that I'm interpreting that is like something that sort of stands out as interesting in, like a, "Whoa, that was interesting way!" And I'm not really thinking, I'm not really thinking of anything, but I do find my work interesting. Like, I like, I love my job; I love being a librarian. And, because I'm not doing the same thing every day, it keeps me, you know, it's, I think that it stays interesting because of that fact. It sort of keeps me challenged, and, engaged in what I'm doing, and I also really like helping students. Like, that's why I became a librarian is because I wanted to help students succeed, in this world of academia, which I think can be a little bit mysterious sometimes, especially when students first come to college. So that's sort of like my personal reason why I became a librarian is to help with that process. So, yeah, I don't know, that's sort of a non-answer. But I find my job interesting and I feel like there are things every day that I am excited to work on, and so, yeah.

That's, that's what I'm going to say. If something occurs to me that is, like, "That's was crazy thing," then I'll, I'll let you know. [Laughing]

KB: So what are your plans and goals at Western now and for the future?

EB: So my plans and goals for the future. Well, I just attained a goal, recently, which is that I got tenure [laughing]. That was a big one. And my, so I went up for tenure last year and was approved at the end of last year, but then it didn't actually kick in until this fall so this is my first term as a tenured Associate Professor, so that was a big goal. So I guess my next goal along those lines would be when I go up for Full Professor, which will not be for at least five years, and probably longer than that.

My other goals have to do with you know, I'm already thinking about the next publication that I'm going to work on, the next study. I think that I am going to do a sabbatical in the next year or two, where I travel to the UK because a lot of my research has to do with the that, sort of recreational reading, and reading for pleasure and how that helps students actually achieve academically as well as helps their well-being. And the UK has a lot, is really into that right now; like as a country, they have a lot of conversation, a sort of country-wide conversation going on about students' well-being and like how different parts of the university can help with that. And so I'm going to, I think I'm going to do a study where I compare US students and UK students, and how they use their, those collections and how much they read for pleasure and things like that. And so I'm sort of in the beginning phases of planning that; and so, that's definitely a goal that I hope that I can get that together and do it. I'm constantly trying to improve with my teaching, so every time I teach a class, I have a little debrief with myself where I [laughing] think about how it went, and like think about how would've done it better and sort of look up different activities that I could maybe do to achieve the same learning outcomes, or if things didn't go well, I figure out why and like how I can make it better for next time. So that's really like an ongoing goal, is to always improve as an instructor.

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

EB: I mean I talked a lot about what I do in the library and not as much about what I do with like the larger campus and so I think the only thing that I would add is that I...I really appreciate our community here. I've had... I've had mainly good experiences with everyone that I've worked with at Western, and I feel like it's...it's sort of a nice vibe. You know it's...probably you guys feel that, as students too, the fact that it's sort of smaller and a little bit more tighter knit. I did have a little bit of a challenge adjusting to working in academia when I first came here because it is very different from the jobs that I've done before [laughter]. Because I wasn't in...I didn't work in academia before I was librarian, I...after I graduated from undergrad, I...worked in

Washington, D.C. for about seven years, and I was like worked at a non-profit organization doing like organizing and advocacy for various causes. And then became a consultant where I did, like, online writing and fund-raising for nonprofits. So I was very much in like for-profit world in that job, and then the non-profit world with the previous jobs. Both of which are very different from academia in various ways. Much faster paced [laughing], and so I...when I came here I had to like have a talk with myself where I needed to like ratchet back the energy like at least fifty percent. No, but that's sort of a joke. Only a little bit [Laugh]. But. But so I mean just in that sense, like there has been a little bit of an adjustment, but now that I am you know, sort of, have been here for...for six years then, I feel like I'm used to it. And I like, I know the lay of the land I really enjoy it, and I enjoy the people. And I've had a chance to be involved now, in a lot of sort of like broader efforts. That have given me a good view of what other people on this campus do, which I think has helped me appreciate it as well like I was on the Faculty Development Committee the last few years, so I got to see the research that all the different faculty in different departments are doing which I never would've seen that otherwise, 'cause I only know what the Humanities faculty are doing.

And like this year I'm on the Student Conduct Committee, which is a really interesting view as well. And like obviously you see a lot of things that students are doing that they shouldn't be doing, but, more than that, I feel like it gives me a good sense of like the support structure that's at Western, and like how seriously the staff take like giving students the tools that they need to like be successful in life as...in addition to in school. And like every time that a student does something that they end up you know talking to one of those people, their goal is not to punish them, it's to like help them learn from the experience. And so seeing that perspective on what happens on the campus has also been really interesting to me. So yeah, that was, that would be the only thing that I would add, just like over the years, I feel like I've gotten a better sense of what Western is as a community and I like it; it's good. [Laughing]

JT: Awesome.

EB: So did I answer everything?

JT: I think so.

All: Yeah.

JT: Thank you so much for your time.

EB: You're welcome. Thanks for asking.

[End of Transcription.]

