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Sharyne Ryals Interview 2016

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Sharyne Ryals, Administrative Program Assistant, Social Science Division, Western Oregon University



Keegan Le Bleu: Right, we are here to conduct an interview with Ms. Sharyne Ryals, this is for History 408. Just to introduce ourselves; I am Keegan LeBleu.

Jeff St. John: I am Jeff St. John.

Brianna Williford: I'm Brianna Williford

Spencer Welter: I'm Spencer Welter.

KL: All right, I'll begin with the first question. When did you start working at Western, and what were the circumstances that led you to come to work at Western?

Sharyne Ryals: I started about 11 years ago, so I think it was in January of 2005. I had worked previously - - my job most previous to coming here was about 10 years I worked in the semi—conductor industry; I worked for a silicon wafer manufacturer. At the time they were the largest private employer in Salem, and then that industry is really volatile, and there was a shake-out and mergers. We were bought a couple times, and eventually it closed down. A week after we closed down the plant and I was laid off, and I mean, I made a good living, I was treated well, and that was all great, but I fell down my basement stairs. So sometimes life circumstances intervene and you have to really rethink what your path forward's going to be, I had to think about what I

wanted to do with the next 20 years or so of my working life, and I wasn't getting any younger. People had always told me "go work for the state, go work for the state," so as I was rehabbing I was doing all these state applications and the job out here (actually it was in the Math Department at the time) showed up and I applied, and there was something like 96 applicants. It was a very difficult time employment wise, I thought "We'll, see how that goes." I didn't really have office experience at that time, I had a lot of supervisory experience and sort of office experience a little bit related to that; anyways so I got that job and I've been here since.

KL: You mentioned the Math Department, have you had any different positions here? Math Department, and you've been here in the Social Sciences?

SR: No, those are the only two, I was there in Math for about six years, maybe four over here, four to five over here.

KL: Okay, thank you.

BW: So what is the general, what do you do day to day, what is your job here at Western? What kind of work do you do?

SR: So the departments I'm, I'm basically student and facility support, like that's the main part. I might help faculty with projects, assist students with all kinds of questions that relate to the Social Sciences or other things on campus. You can see I have a reception area so that's kind of a main thing that I do. There's a lot of scheduling, web page updating, you know, making sure all the office equipment runs, and mail is delivered. So there's a lot of variety in my job really which is nice.

BW: So does that mean that you run the social sciences website?

SR: Yes, I have access to all the pages, there's also people or some faculty members that work on pages, but I have, with the Division Chair, responsibility for those, yes.

BW: And then what kind of questions do you answer, what kind of people come into the office?

SR: So there's a lot that need advising, it's a lot of just getting them to the right person type of thing. I don't have all of the answers obviously [Laughs], but they don't know if they need to go back to Admissions, or the Registrar, or which advisor they need to see for which program. Even where to find their class because there's a lot of classrooms in HSS [Humanities/Social Sciences Building officially called Bellamy Hall] and people from all over campus come to try to find rooms and things.

SW: So, since coming to Western, what's been your most interesting experience?

SR: So when I was thinking about that question there's - - it's a college campus, there's tons of interesting things going on all the time that I don't have time to pay attention to sometimes, but there's some kind of odd things that came to mind when I thought about that. When I started in Math, there was this little building, I don't know if any of you know, it was called Arnold Arms, and it's a parking lot now and it was right behind West House; and it was basically not safe, not up to code and not particularly safe I was told. But that is where I was the first couple of years and so it was an old dorm. My office was on the third floor, wasn't air conditioned. I didn't have to work in August so I did have August off. There was no elevator, you had to go up and down the stairs, and so there wasn't access for certain students even, and things, and so it was just very

weird being in that building. We had to have bungee cords on the back of the doors to hold them open because the building slanted slightly [All laugh], and it eventually got burned down and became a parking lot. There was also, in the summer, we would leave the windows open to try to keep air and ventilation in there. At some point it started smelling like cats in there in the stairwell, and so I'm pretty sure animals were coming in there at night. Crazy things that I don't have to deal with now, but it's just a really funny experience.

The other thing that comes to mind is, working in the Social Sciences, a lot of people, their books, or their projects, or their research takes them to other countries and all kinds of interesting ideas and things, and I'm sort of in a position to hear, and you know, be exposed to a lot of that. And any other office job I've had, I don't think I'd have that. Really, it's interesting for me, it broadens my horizons, and even more recently, we have a number of Saudi students that are public policy majors because that's become approved by their government or whatever, and they come in and talk about their experience coming here, what their country's like, how different things are, and it always sort of reminds me how all this—the human experience is—how similar we all are, really, even with the differences they come here with, it's just very interesting to me.

SW: Is there any specific experience or interaction you've had that was particularly memorable from these students?

SR: It's probably fresh in my mind because it was the other day, one of the students was talking about the oil company there starting to sell shares in their company, even though it's only a small amount. We went to something on the Internet and looked at it, and he was also showing me there's some new big financial city there, and we Googled it and it came up on the thing and it was like this incredibly lavish big business building complex in the middle of the desert. It's just very foreign to us, but that sticks out in my mind just because it was a couple weeks ago.

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

SR: Well, I'd like every student, every faculty member, everyone that sort of finds their way to the Social Sciences office to feel welcome and know that they can come here and get help, and like I said, I don't have all the answers, but after being here ten plus years I know where the resources are and who to contact, where people can go to get their problem solved. So that's one thing I always want to continue working on. I have some things related to, I mean now that I feel like I've been at my job a few years and I sort of know how to manage that pretty well, though things change all the time and that varies, I want to be able to, some of the things I mentioned before about all the things that go on campus, when you're in a new position you don't feel like you can leave for a half hour to go listen to a lecture or do something. But I'd like to be able to do things like that a little bit more because I think it would just help link me more to students and other people on campus anyways and benefit everyone.

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

SR: Not that I can think of. I mean, obviously you guys know I work with wonderful faculty who are very supportive all the time, so it's really an easy place to work.

JS: Alright, if there's nothing else you'd like to add I think that's all we need.

SR: Okay.