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Mark Henkels Interview 2015

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**Mark Henkels, Department of Political Science, and Chair, Social Science Division,
Western Oregon University**



Benjamin Kirchner, Jordan Farley, Shawnee Garza, interview with Mark Henkels, November 25, 2015

Benjamin Kirchner: When did you start working at Western?

Mark Henkels: The fall of 1988

BK: And what were the circumstances that led you to start working here?

MH: Well... I didn't plan on being a professor. But I did other things and I was finishing up my Ph.D., and I was a teaching assistant. And I was planning at that point to work in D.C. and someone said, "Wouldn't being a professor be kind of a good life?" And I was like "Oh, hmm." And so like the last couple years I thought "Well maybe that will be the option."

And so then when I interviewed in different places and had some choices to actually be a professor, and then, there you go.

BK: Sweet. Have you had different positions here? And, if so, what jobs were they and what were you in charge of?

MH: Not really. This would be my different job. Because right now, I'm a Division Chair.

BK: Oh.

MH: But [Division Chairs] are half [time] professors, and in Social Science, the tradition has always been that you're still mainly a professor. Because you could wind up going back down to the hallway. So if you make decisions that are un-professorial, like administrative oriented rather than instructor oriented or professor oriented, you're going to have to go live amongst the professors. Which is good. That's the way we like it. But I am a half-time administrator now. I still teach two classes when I have half course days or half schedule days.

Jordan Farley: What is the basis for your job at Western?

MH: Well, in fundamentally we have three assignments, where we teach, do research, and perform public service. Teaching is by far the most important component to it and teaching is read very broadly. So, for example, I am a pre-law advisor, I manage internships, I try to set things up for students who are going to go out and look for internships, just get experiences and stuff like that, so we think of teaching very broadly. And for public service it depends on the individual, being that some do it on campus more, and off campus more, mine tends to be more on campus. There are few areas where I periodically go to the legislature, something like that, give testimony or something, but mine's mostly on campus service. And then research I mostly work in politics and government, I do budget materials particularly, those are the kind of areas I do most my research in.

JF: Would you give us examples of those kinds of work that you do? I guess you pretty much answered that [Laughter.]

MH: That's most of it yeah [Laughter.] I mean I teach every class a little different.

JF: What is the typical workday like for you?

MH: I sit around and hope for interviews by people [Laughter.] And right now its seasonal, okay, so I actually have to be on contract in the summer and in the summer I spend my time mostly writing reports which is really boring but it's okay and I get to review my colleagues and write down and do other stuff like that but that's like not that consuming. But during the school year when its advising time like we have right now I'm sort of the default advisor for anyone that clicks anything regarding Social Sciences and so I'll be very busy seeing people for the next couple weeks. At the end of the quarter I tend to see a lot of students, which is good because I really like doing that, so that's number one this time of year. Classes by far teaching and grading. Most of my grading, because I have lots of people coming in my office or I at least I can quite often, I do most of my grading at home on the weekends or at night and most of my class preps are at home or at some time. But the other thing I do is organize meetings for the Division. I have

to handle paperwork for the Division like when they do curriculum change. Complaints about professors come to me ideally because we keep it at the lowest level possible it's like it's better for them to see me than to go see the Dean or Provost we like to keep it down here and take care of it, but I mean, you know, hopefully its like we are the first people to come to it. And sometimes I'll do recruitment things, so last year and probably this year I will spend a few hours a week every week over at Chemeketa trying to kind of be an access point for Chemeketa to meet Chemeketa faculty or Chemeketa staff and students mainly. But mostly I'm still lucky to spend most of my time being student oriented work with them, work with actual live students.

Shawnee Garza: Question three: What was the most interesting event or happening that you have experienced while working at Western?

MH: I cannot come up with one, I have to come up with multiple.

SG: Give us a couple.

MH: OK, can I give three?

SG: Yes.

JF: Three is perfect.

MH: Okay, one that was really fun we've done twice actually. We've had the Oregon Supreme Court come. And as the pre-law adviser, I helped arrange it with Dr. Mayhead in Communications. The Supreme Court came and we were able get it so our students were able to sit and have lunch with them in the middle of the case, or after the case depending on the schedule. That was a big deal and lots of people came from all over. So, yeah I mean the campus, people were really interested, the Pacific Room, the large room was actually pretty full. We had hundreds of people watching the Supreme Court and got to have lunch with them afterwards.

SG: Wow that's cool.

MH: Yeah, Oregon is great for that. It is. You're so close to the government you can directly see the people. But that was definitely number one. Another one was we, I, got a team, was a long time ago now, but I was adviser in environmental studies and there was a competition among northwest schools on trying to basically recover salmon in a watershed project. But it was not defined what watershed or what the strategies would be. And we were supposed to prepare a paper and do a presentation and the competition would take place up in Seattle and Oregon State and Whitman College and UW and a bunch of different schools participated. About eight northwest, all northwestern schools and we got Best White Paper. Which is, we did the best homework. We wrote the best thing. But, what was really fun was we got to take the students up to Seattle for the competition, you know, that was really interesting, and we got a little plaque and so I'd say that was second.

I think the third one really just happens occasionally but once in awhile I'll be over at the Capitol visiting an intern, and every now and then I'll have one of these days where I see a lot of my former students. And it teaches you that when you're a political scientist and you choose to do

public process administration as your field, it's just really cool to just see, to run into people, you know, giving testimony for an agency or working on staff, maybe being legislators. We don't have too many of them but we do have some. And so you'll just have a day where you kind of run into -- or lobbying, we have quite a few that are lobbyists -- and you run into like four or five students in the Capitol who are kind of long gone, you know, and here they are working in the field, and that's the third thing that's just pretty cool.

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

MH: Um...golf, no, that's a joke [Laughter]. I could retire relatively soon, but I think I'll be staying for a while because this is probably more interesting than anything I can think of that's different. I want to go back down the hallway, I want to go back, get done...with my term here in this office and be able to move back to the main floor, with my colleagues and hang out. But as far as specific objectives at Western, teach, and work with students directly and I don't know, I'm kind of already there. You know as far as change, I don't really have a vision of changing anything. There's pressures for us to develop maybe a graduate program but I, and I can see supporting it, but to tell you the truth, that's for the next generation. I've been here 28 years, I don't know if I want to start something new that I have to invest in tremendously as much as I just want to just make sure what I'm doing, I continue to do well, and I keep to continue to enjoy it. So, teaching, and research, service. I've [got] a couple books up in the pipeline somewhere. I mean the deep pipeline. It's not like they're coming out yet, you know. But I've got a couple plans with that, too.

BK: Very cool. And those are our four questions, so,

MH: There you go.

All: Thank you.

MH: Thank you and good luck with the rest of your project.