

[Video: IMG1125.mov]

HAGGERTY: Why don't you introduce yourself, say your name and where you are currently.

ALLEN: I'm David Allen and currently I'm the Director of Nursing and Health Studies at the University of Washington in Bothell. I've been here for two years and prior to that, my immediate prior position, I was Department Chair of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. Actually I was originally Chair of Women Studies and then while I was Chair was when we changed it to Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. And then before that for...I'm going to guess fifteen years – maybe ten, somewhere in that range – my faculty position was in the School of Nursing but I was adjunct faculty in Women Studies and taught the Research Methodology class to graduate students, and then I had a number of doctorate students. I was the first adjunct faculty who was allowed to actually Chair a dissertation in Women Studies, that was Julie Stevenson's [? 0:01:05.8] dissertation. So I have long a history with the department.

My history in feminism goes back to being a child of the '60s – I was involved in Civil Rights work and Anti-Vietnam War activities. And as a result of that, like a lot of my male – particularly white male – colleagues, was sort of caught up short by the observation that we were really interested in freeing men but not so much women. So I was really, I think it's fair to say “disciplined” by second-wave feminists in my life. And one of your questions was, “How did that show up?” and I have to really say, I was partnered with a woman who was an academic also at the time, that it was domestic politics. The classic example would be, we'd had someone over for dinner and if I cooked there would just be this huge to do about it, “Oh my god what a wonderful cook and a great meal.” And to Jeannie they would say, “How did you find a man that can cook?” And if we had people over and Jeannie cooked was it was like, “Oh, nice dinner.” So that whole sense of, men were special if they carried their half of the domestic— and of course it would just completely piss off my partner, that inequity.

I was in left-wing fields, did labor organizing. And then I went into nursing and that was a really funny experience for me and I think that's where feminism became an academic practice for me as well a kind of intellectual and research practice. And that was because I had been in these progressive spaces and trying to adapt to the reality of second wave feminism, I could give you a long list of women who thought I was only moderately good at that. But then I went into nursing which was at that time – still is largely – a field that was run by women, for women, in the sense of at that point it was about 98% women. All of the faculty were women, all of the deans were women, and as a field it was explicitly anti-feminism. The major nursing organization for example, the American Nursing Association did not come out for the Equal Rights Amendment for women until it was too late and the amendment failed. So the organized nursing was anti-union and anti-feminism and I couldn't figure that out, coming out of the kind of political struggles I had been in.

I was eventually hired on the faculty of Nursing at the University of Wisconsin, Madison – the other UW. And because I was trying to sort out how feminism and labor politics fit with nursing, I also then got an appointment in the Women's Studies program in Madison. I was hired here in the School of Nursing in Seattle in 1988 and I think almost immediately thereafter I applied for an adjunct appointment in the Women Studies program because my publications and my research had been really trying to work through the role of social justice, racial and gender justice in nursing and nursing education and the ways in which we were reproducing the field that was really profoundly conservative. I needed the interdisciplinarity and I needed the political space of the feminist environments to keep myself grounded or balanced, I guess it would be a way to put it.

So I did that for a long time, and that sort of gradually increased. As I said, I taught the Feminist Methodologies class for a bunch of years and gradually took on more graduate students. And then about eight years ago, I suppose, Judy

Howard, who was then the Chair, moved into her current position as Divisional Dean of Social Sciences and they did a search for a department chair and I was asked to apply. I assume other people applied, I don't know, but I was picked.

There was a reaction to that, as you might imagine so. It's funny, just before you came here I was talking to my youngest daughter who at that point was around sixteen and the whole goal of being a parent when you have a sixteen-year-old is that you're not supposed to be visible, right? You're supposed to be this sort of invisible chauffeur. So we're going out to the door to go to the gym together and on the front porch above the fold in The Seattle Times is an article that says "UW Women Studies tells Professor "You da man." [?] It was on The Seattle Times, it was on NPR, Channel 7 did a fifteen or twenty minute segment on it, it was on Canadian news events, it was picked by the AP news service, there was a large flap about it. Most of that flap, not all of it but most of it, was external to the department.

There was definitely some anxiety within the department. And that was, I would say, equally split between the problem of whiteness and the problem of gender. But there was also, at that point, already a significant conversation about de-coupling bodies from politics. So most of the faculty just wanted a good Department Chair and they wanted somebody who had a history of commitment to feminism and anti-racism and they knew me well enough to know that part of my work. That flap continued on, I had one of the doctoral students just two or three years ago went to a conference and all people wanted to talk to her about was what it was like to have a man as a Department Chair.

[0:08:15.7]

HAGGERTY: And what year was that, that you became Chair?

ALLEN: I think I started there in '05.

HAGGERTY: So still pretty recent.

ALLEN: Yeah, pretty recent, because I left in '12 and I think I was there for seven years. I think that's right, more or less.

While I was a Chair in the Women Studies department, there were a lot of conversations among our majors saying about two kind of related issues. One of them was there were very few men in the class and they wanted a chance, in a sense, to practice their feminism with men, not just with each other. And then the vast bulk of the courses were centered on the lives of women and women's experiences.

If you take as central theoretical principal of feminism that genders are inextricably strictly bound – feminism and masculinity are defined in terms of each other – then they thought that we should have courses on masculinity. And so with a group of undergraduate students and a couple of graduate students we developed a course. There had been one taught by Ken Clatterbaugh in the Philosophy department on masculinity years before, but it hadn't been taught for ten or fifteen years. So the students and I developed a new course on contesting masculinities and I taught that for I think maybe three years there before I came here. And then, just last quarter, I took it and adapted it for a freshman course and taught a course here on masculinities and health, the ways which trying to be masculine kills boys and men and damages women. So I've continued to try to keep it as a focus of my teaching and obviously in my personal work as well. That's the history part. There's lots of details but I think that's probably nothing that the big picture.

[0:10:35.8]

HAGGERTY: Tell me about the name change. You said you were the Chair when the name change happened?

ALLEN: Yeah that was interesting, good question. The doctoral students, the PhD students had lobbied for a number of years to change the name. And it had really never gone anywhere but it was one of those conversations that would come up and it would bubble around for a while and then it would disappear. And of course over that time, the whole field was also changing and that conversation was changing. It was just bizarre – we had a retreat, one of our annual retreats and I think, my memory was that one of the faculty – I think it was Amanda – had just come back from the NWSA (National Women's Studies Association) meetings, or maybe it was another conference, and she basically said in this retreat that she thought that we ought to reconsider our name. Usually those were like— I thought, “Oh my gosh, there is the agenda for the year.” Within two hours we had settled on it. So it was one of the things where the work had been done, the work had been done, and then all of a sudden it got to a tipping point in terms of both the political theory of the field and where the faculty were and where our students were.

That happened really quickly and at the same moment we were able to get the PhD program re-titled as Feminist Studies. And there was a lot of discussion about, of course, the title for the department and it was still felt at that point – and I would probably argue it is still true – that there is enough of a backlash against the use of the term “feminism” that for undergraduates it would really be a political obstacle to have that as a name of a department. And, like lots of departments around the country, there was, is, a deep historical legacy and commitment to the Women's Movement. So people were not comfortable having the signifier “Women” taken out of the title even though Gender and Sexuality Studies in some ways makes more sense because women is a gender, right?

If you look at the names of the departments across the country you see that tension being played out, some of them are just Gender and Sexuality Studies, many of them – the majority – are keeping “Women” in the title because of that

legacy. And I think also a deeper sense that the political roots in feminism and the Women's Movements are roots that we turn to at moments when we're threatened in the academy. And so we felt like there would be a political liability also of not keeping that signifier in the title. But it was a stunningly uncontroversial shift. And the doctoral students who had been there lobbying for it and lobbying for it were like, "Really? That's all there is to it?"

And then, from my point of view as the Department Chair, the interesting and frustrating part was the bureaucracy around it. So it just seemed like an easier thing. I mean, we had a discussion, we changed our name – turns out, it doesn't matter what you call the department but if you need to change names of courses, if you need to change majors, all of those were different political, bureaucratic processes. So it took a long time to actually make it happen but the decision was really fast.

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HAGGERTY: And did I hear something about the "Women" part, it had an apostrophe or didn't?

ALLEN: It did not.

HAGGERTY: That was different than other departments, what was that?

ALLEN: That debate preceded me but it was still pretty intense. The distinction was that we were called Women Studies and the theory there was that the object of analysis was women – it wasn't that women owned the analysis. So it isn't that men and women can't do Women Studies, but the study of women – and by that they mean women's lives of course – doesn't just belong to women. The lack of the apostrophe was a political distinction, a theoretical distinction that was almost universally ignored. So whenever you saw our name in catalogues or in bulletins, it was always "Women's Studies" with an "apostrophe s." Some people thought it

was crazy enough to have the “apostrophe s,” and some people thought it was an important distinction to make. The whole time it was Women Studies not Women’s Studies.

[0:15:51.8]

HAGGERTY: Interesting. So tell me about some of your experience being the Chair of the department as a male. How were the students about that? Or any sort of backlash or—?

ALLEN: It's always a mixed political analysis because people don't agree, right? So I would say there were... When I first started teaching Women Studies I had had this experience, not uncommonly, where the first day of class – and these were graduate students but from all over the university because it was a very interdisciplinary class – would walk into my classroom and see me and think they were in the wrong room because there was no history of having men as a voice for feminist studies. By the time I became Chair I would say that—

Actually before I did it, I polled the department, I polled the undergraduates, and I polled the graduate students about what they thought about having me as a candidate before I applied because I didn't want to do it if they were interested in sustaining a separatist environment – which, I believe in the utility of separatist environments. The graduate students were completely in support of it. Their primary focus, at that point, just because of what was on the table, was anti-racism. And they all knew me, so that wasn't a neutral test. It was sort of like, “Is it David, or is it a man?” But the undergraduates, who didn't know me, were much more significantly split. And they were split over a very real issue which is: “There are lots of capable women, why would you give this job to a white guy?” It was debated in The Daily a number of times.

And the fact of the matter is, I don't actually know who applied, but department

chair jobs look to the outside, they are high status, but there are often jobs nobody wants, particularly in places like UW Seattle which is a R1 research intensive institution. And it's because, essentially, you do end up sacrificing your own academic career for the period that you are serving as a department chair. If you went and looked at my vita during periods when I was not a Department Chair you would see growth in publications and grants, and then periods when I was it would taper off and then go back up and go back down again. So for that reason, often times there actually is not great pool of people But it was also not an un-biased poll because Arts and Sciences – where Women Studies is located in UW Seattle – they have a very, in my experience, unusual search process: the faculty never know who is in the pool and they have no moment of voting on who the candidates are. So from their point of view, somebody shows up some day and says, “Hi, I'm your new Department Chair.” So when I polled them, even giving them fairly confidential ways of getting back to me and said, “Do you want me to put my name in or you don't?” It was really—it would be hard for them to say “No” and then find out Monday I'm the Department Chair, right?

Even though I got very little feedback, except from one faculty person who I think was doing it symbolically more than actually, the department was pretty comfortable with it. There were members of the feminist community who were extraordinarily unhappy about it. And one of them, who is a well-known professional staff in the University, when we changed the name of the department, she said the only thing that made her more mad than having me as a Department Chair was changing the name.

So it hangs on, but I think the world of young feminists has changed enough now that is not as remarkable but there's still, and I think ought to be, the very live question of, “Why waste an opportunity to develop an academic leader by giving it to a white guy who has plenty of ways to develop a leadership?” And for me, that remains the kind of fundamental question, always. It really boils down to any



particular moment, what are the candidates? And I would say, all things being equal, you ought not give it to someone like me but if they're not equal, sometimes I'm a good choice. So that's my sense of how that played out. I'm sure that there was, maybe is, more controversy about that then I saw, because I would be the last person in some ways. That is why it was so interesting to have a graduate student come back and say, "All they wanted to do is talk about having you as a Department Chair," so it's clear that it was out there bubbling. But my experience was that it was really fairly settled out at that point.

[0:21:50.8]

HAGGERTY: Any big highlights that jump out while you were Chair?

ALLEN: There were a ton of highlights. The name change was big – it was very significant, politically and intellectually. I was there at a lucky time in the sense that it had been a very small department with a very stable faculty and while I was there, Amanda Swarr, Sasha Welland and Michelle Habell-Pallan all joined the department. So within a couple of years, you had really a transformation of new blood and new perspectives. And I think that was also one of the things that opened it up for more change. That had nothing to do with me, it was just sheer luck that I happened to be there at that time but it's always, for me, fun watching organizations change and adapt to new people. So that was just fabulous and the quality of scholarship was wonderful. One of the things that was really fun with me while I was there is we deepened our partnership with the Women's Center, Sutapa Basu and the work she does. And she became a personal friend but also a good political ally, I really enjoyed working with her.

One of the things that we tried to do, unsuccessfully, while I was there is that Women Studies inevitably gets sucked into the academy and because faculty's jobs, then, are focused on their research and on students, their attention to our stakeholders in the community and the political grounding of Women Studies and

feminism in the politics of the community gets diminished. We felt like, as a department, that we really wanted to try to re-build and re-strengthen those relationships. And we had meetings with a number of agencies that served, like, communities of women of color in the community, trying to find ways to have more sustained relationships and connections, and it didn't go anywhere. And I suspect that was as much my fault because I couldn't keep it up on the radar –other things would bump in – financial changes or personal changes and stuff.

The other thing I would say that really happened where I did had an active role but that wasn't really my—I don't get credit for and I shouldn't get credit for, was we had a bunch of promotions. So Priti Ramamurthy, the current Chair, was promoted to Professor. Shirley Yee was promoted to Professor. Becky [?], who is now out here at Bothell was promoted to Senior Lecturer and both Sasha and Amanda Swarr were promoted to Associate Lecturers. And that sort of stabilized— it both recognized, in the case of Shirley and Priti, the significance of these senior scholars, but it also took our un-tenured faculty and really cemented them. So it felt like I was there during a couple of real developmental moments that just felt historically fortunate.

And then the highlights are always people, students – the students were the highlights. In fact, as you came in I was just writing—I've written, this week, letters of recommendations for two former doctorate students from Gender Studies who were applying for positions. So that's really who I have sustained relations with over the years have been the students, a few undergraduates, but mostly the doctoral students because I spend more time with them.

[0:25:56.9]

HAGGERTY: Those continuous connections. That's great. We have a little under five minutes left, is there anything you feel you really need to say to get out to these people that are hearing about the program?

ALLEN: I would say that the next challenge for the department – and for the field, really – is to build more systematic linkages. We tried while I was there to get a three-campus Gender Studies program going between Bothell, Tacoma and Seattle and that effort lapsed. And like I said, we tried to build some more consistent networks among non-profits and agencies serving them. I feel like both one of the risks to the field and one of the moral imperatives is to sustain relationships. And higher education in particular, research-intensive universities tend to make that very challenging because the work is so internal to the school. And we were trying to do the same thing here in this department it's just—it's a danger of higher education that it gets too isolated from the population.

HAGGERTY: But nice that you can move here and continue your studies and put them into the step that you are doing now.

ALLEN: I'm kind of finishing my career here and so one of the things that is just really fun which has nothing to do with this is simply being in a smaller institution. You can just get so much more done, so much faster.

HAGGERTY: Great. Thank you so much.

ALLEN: You're welcome thanks for doing this. It will be fun to have access to it.

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