Gregory Trujillo interview

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This is January 19, 2005. The CWU Living History Project. The Interviewer’s name this morning is Ross Brigg; and the Man of the Hour, our interviewee is Greg Trujillo. So, welcome, Greg.

G.T.: Glad to be here.

R.B.: Why don’t you give us, uh, - start off with a brief personal history prior to your coming to Central.

G.T.: I took my degree at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque. During the time that I was there, I, uh, did some work with the university as a psychometrist. A psychometrist is a fancy term for one who gives tests. I did a lot of testing for the university. I did a lot of GRE’s, Graduate Record Examinations, Miller Analogies, things of that nature. I spent two years doing that. When I left the university with my Bachelor’s, prior to taking the doctorate, I was a teacher for the Albuquerque public school system, at a school that I’ll never forget, Washington Junior High. At Washington Junior High, I taught English, Math and whatever else – even coached a little bit. I coached a little football. When I came out of the university with my doctorate, I came immediately to Central Washington University, where I began as a Counseling Psychologist and Coordinator of Testing; and after that, uh, it’s history – I’ll have to confess that when I came to Central, I came here with the intention of being for one year, and one year only. I had interviewed at another institution in New Mexico and I was offered a job there, but I had already committed myself to Central, verbally, and I didn’t want to go back on my commitment. I came here for one year and that one year stretched into thirty.

R.B.: (chuckle) So you came to Central in what, ’70?


R.B.: ’69.

G.T.: …along with fifty-three other faculty members and staff members.

R.B.: Okay. And who was – who ran your shop back in those days, Greg?

G.T.: Um, I was in the Counseling Center and Bob Miller was the Director of Counseling. The Dean of students at the time was, uh, a man by the name of Witherspoon. I wish I could remember his first name but that was a long time ago.

R.B.: Yeah. What were your first impressions of both campus and the town?

G.T.: Uh, the town first. I came here from Albuquerque, which was considerably bigger, and is considerably bigger now than Ellensburg. I was – I thought to myself, “Gee, everything closes up at six o’clock. There are no stores open on Sunday. There is nothing – there is no alcohol sold on Sunday. If I want to go down to the hardware store to get something on weekends, I can’t do that.” I thought it was, um, the pace was considerably slower than Albuquerque. The town was smaller. It was just a slow pace to which I had to get accustomed. My wife and I. Uh, the university? I thought and still continue to believe that it’s a beautiful campus. I came here in the summer and the campus was always at its best in the summer. Everything is green. The buildings were, uh, I thought the campus to be a, uh, something like an Ivy League campus. The ivy going over the buildings, brick buildings – pretty well contained at that time; and, uh, I was thoroughly impressed. Perhaps that’s why I decided to be here for the next thirty years.
R.B.: (laugh) Okay. Your first assignment was – is Counseling Psychology and Testing Coordinator?

G.T.: Yes, that is correct.

R.B.: What additional . . . How did you progress through your career at Central?

G.T.: Oh my. That’s a long story. Uh, two years after I came here, I was appointed Director of Counseling and Testing. That was when Bob Miller moved on to become Dean of Students. The following year, we split counseling and testing and I became Director of what we called Counseling and Evaluative Services. Four years later, I became Assistant to the President and, at the same time, Associate Dean of Students. After being in that position for four years, I moved on to Associate Dean of Admissions and Records and Director of Institutional Studies. I moved on from there four years later to become Associate Provost for Institutional Studies and, uh – I forget the title, had so many – Associate Provost for Institutional Studies. I’ll stop there. Something like four years later, I became Vice President of Student Affairs; and about four years after that, I went back to the Office of Institutional Studies. I guess I’d have to say that numbers and statistics are my first love. An after that I retired. Now, I think I got ‘em all. If I didn’t, I missed a title somewhere. It’s very evident that I couldn’t hold a job.

R.B.: Well, I was gonna make that comment, Greg. Either that, or they couldn’t find the right spot for you. Now you were Assistant to which – Don Gary? Assistant to the President?


R.B.: Oh, that early in your career. Okay. All right. So you served under Jim then for four years, you said.

G.T.: No, just for one year.

R.B.: Oh, one year.

G.T.: I was his Assistant for his last year – the last year of his presidency.

R.B.: Oh, okay.

G.T.: Then I finished out the remaining three and a half as, uh, Associate Dean of Admissions and Records and Institutional Studies.

R.B.: Now, when you came in ’69, there were what, around 3,000 students? Thirty-five hundred?

G.T.: Uh, I think it was slightly bigger than that -

R.B.: Oh, yeah?

G.T.: ‘cause the growth had started -

R.B.: Oh, okay.

G.T.: - and, uh, it had gone from something like two to three thousand students to maybe four, maybe five thousand.

R.B.: Oh, okay. All right. So we had – Yeah, I’d forgotten that. Okay. Oh, I love this question. Who were some of the influential or unforgettable persons during your time on Central’s campus?
G.T.: I think that the most influential – the person who – who gave me the most guidance, initially, was Bob Miller. Bob Miller was a – he was just like a curmudgeon – white beard. He looked like, uh – he looked like a famous psychologist; but he was a very down-to-earth gentleman. He probably gave me a lot of guidance, a lot of help in the first year – first two years. And uh, I love him dearly, still. I see him occasionally. Unforgettable characters. I would have to say that my most unforgettable character is one President Ivory Nelson. Uh, why? I was the Vice President of Student Affairs, while he was President; and he and I had diametrically opposed ideas of how one works with personnel. Uh, he was at one polar extreme and I on the other end; and, uh, we didn’t argue a lot. He would suggest things that I would do. . . I was to do, and I would do what I thought was the right thing to do. Uh, we didn’t always see eye to eye on things; and I think that probably didn’t do me a lot of good when it came to moving along in other directions. Other unforgettable characters? Uh, Ross Byrd. Who can forget Ross Byrd? And one more individual I think I’ll mention is uh, Dick Meyer. Dick Meyer was a person with whom I worked in Student Affairs for, oh, twenty years, and eventually, he was Associate Vice-President of Student Affairs when I was the Vice President. Uh, he has forgotten more about how to work with students than most of us ever learn. Uh, he left the university some years to go on to his own Vice Presidency. In terms of students, there are a couple that stand out in my mind. Uh, the first student was a young man who came here to Central to play basketball. Uh, basketball players come and go. Basketball players uh, last around four years and then they’re gone. This basketball player lasted perhaps two years and then he got into trouble; and it became my responsibility to tell him that he was no longer wanted on campus. He was big – 6'5" – from Washington D.C., and, uh, and I didn’t know how he would react to that. He reacted in a way that was, uh, fine. He left campus. About two years later, I was walking through the SUB and low and behold, there he is standing over by the pit. He saw me. I saw him. I thought, “Oh, no. What’s he going to do?” Well, he came over. He shook my hand and he thanked me for what I – for talking to him when he was gone; and he said that he had straightened himself out and he owed some of that to me. This surprised me. Another student that came to me, uh, was a young woman. This was back in the ‘70’s, when uh, as you know, student activists were a dime a dozen on campus; and I still recall her dressed in overalls, bib overalls. And there were times when she came near me I thought she was gonna go give the salute. Sometimes she did, sometimes she didn’t. Uh, she graduated. She went through, and, uh, she remained an activist, but mellowed somewhat; and right now she has a pretty responsible – educative responsibility in Yakima. I can – I could probably go on, but I think that’s enough on characters.

R.B.: Well, there are a lot of them around. Uh, please comment on the political problems that you faced during your time on campus, particularly, your role as an administrator.

G.T.: I think that, uh, the – I don’t know how to capture it. I don’t know that this should be characterized as a political problem, but it brought in politicians. Uh, at one time, there was some consideration of – by the students, of bringing in a Taco Bell in to the campus – onto the campus and into the SUB. They had to have the tacos. Well, this didn’t set to well with the business people of the community, especially those others in the fast-food business. A big brouhaha erupted, pitting campus versus some of the merchants, downtown; and low and behold, here comes a local Representative – a Legislative Representative and got into the mix. I’m not sure that it was her responsibility and perhaps she was looking for votes – I don’t know; but she got mixed up into it. Other political events that I had to deal with, uh, were at the State Legislature and Council on Higher Education. Uh, I had to give testimony several times and, uh, one always had to be careful that one said the right thing or, uh, the political ramifications for the university might be disastrous. Uh, I think that, uh, I think that we did pretty well as an administrative team, although, uh, there are times when perhaps we understated our case or overstated our case – probably overstated more than understated – and, uh, that did not sit too well with some of our local politicians and some of our state politicians. Other political – well, politics is the use of power to gain ends, and, uh, we have had our own internal politics on campus. Union, non-union, uh, Department A versus Department B, uh, College A versus College B, and, uh, each one is striving to achieve its ends. Sometimes, uh, collaboratively, sometimes, not so. Uh, I – when I was an undergraduate, I thought of a – then, of becoming a college professor because I viewed college teaching as probably the best – the blessed of all professions - deep, thoughtful people, thinking, teaching, research, things of that nature. Then, I came to campus and – this campus and any other campus – and I discovered that there is political infighting, political practice of politics to gain ends. Sometimes, it’s done well. Often times, it’s pretty
acrimonious. I can’t think of any other political problems. Uh, we could get into the social scene, but then that’s a whole different story, and still practices politics.

R.B.: What about – this could be related to political – what about budgetary issues that face the, uh, your department, in terms of student affairs or that type of thing, Greg?

G.T.: Uh, our, uh, Department of Student Affairs, all areas – many of the people working in those areas felt that they had been classified as second class citizens within the university environment. And to some degree, that was true. Faculty, then Student Affairs’ folks, and on down the line to, probably, the most vulnerable of all the people who do the lawn care, the tree care in the summer. They’re always the first to be cut back. People in Student Affairs saw that, uh, where faculty had a ladder to climb, that is they could pick rank, tenure, uh, increases in salary by climbing up the ladder. Student Affairs workers had, uh, no such ladder; but the only way that they could get increases with cost of living raises (inaudible) that were given to each and every person on campus, ought to be promoted, and there were limited numbers of promotions. Uh, we lost a few – we lost many people to other institutions. The only way to advance was to go from one college to another college at a higher level, and from that proceed from that college to another college at a higher level. Um, I’ve always felt that, um, the college experience for a student is not just sitting in classroom and learning facts, um, developing cognitively. The college experience is the whole experience – that is, there’s the classroom experience, there’s the classroom, the, uh, the out-of-classroom experience. In all those areas, they’re learning and, uh, quite frankly, I believe that every one, from the highest professor to the secretary who sits at a desk, these are all educators. In a classroom, uh, it’s cognitive learning. In the rest of the university, it is, uh, value learning. Students can learn many things from the secretary. They learn things that, uh, they would never learn from the faculty. They pick up, uh, the value systems of those that they work with, whether they be good or bad, they’re learning. And, uh, I always talked to Rocky Vantolen, they’re learning from you. You teach them the best things you can. They learn from you – how you interact with others, how you interact with them, and you pick the best; and, uh, in that sense, I think that, uh, our lowliest secretaries – I shouldn’t use the word lowliest – the one who gets paid the least, is still teaching as much, but different things, as is the highest paid professor. I forgot what the original question was.

R.B.: I think I hear you saying that you didn’t get your fair share of the budget.

G.T.: That’s true. Uh, we didn’t. Yes, allocations were always made to the university in a lump sum. Then when it came to cutting up the pie within the university, uh, academics departments were first, although academicians will say we didn’t get our share. And, uh, that – one had to deal with that constantly. Uh, the coach to get paid as much as this professor, or the coach had won so many games and, uh, didn’t get what he wanted for it. Uh, I saw one, uh – I had people who would work with two thousand students, uh, in a quarter, and they didn’t get paid as much as the person who taught a thirty-person class. It’s constant. I don’t believe it’s any less so now, than it was then. It’s always, uh – It’s difficult to deal with people and the – I think that, uh, the uh, problems that stick in your mind are those that, uh, were always people problems, whether it be staff, faculty, students, and, uh, I’m afraid that that’s always the way it’s going to be.

R.B.: Yeah. Agreed. Have you sensed or noticed an appreciable, continuing town/gown problem? Or has that been overblown?

G.T.: From my perspective, I’ve always thought that town/gown relationships were fine. Only occasionally, such as with the Taco Bell incident, are there situations that get out of hand. There are occasionally individuals in the community who will not appreciate the university and its students, but on the whole, I think that most of the community is appreciative of the university being here. If the university was not here, we would be – Ellensburg would be a very small community, dependent on the ranching and farming that takes place around here. And, certainly, that has grown, but, uh, it would still be a very small community. Perhaps, on the other hand, - Perhaps, Ellensburg would have been discovered as a bedroom
community by the West-siders and it would be a lot bigger. No, I have not felt that town/gown relationships were a problem.

R.B.: With your administrative experience, has there been a pretty consistent perception on the part administration, toward those downtown relationships? And I don’t have any agenda, I’m just curious.

G.T.: I, uh, I didn’t perceive – I did not perceive that the administration, as a whole, thought that there were problems. There were individuals – there were individuals who thought that there were problems. I cannot say – I would not say that there was any animosity between the administrative team of the university and the community.

R.B.: What about changes on campus during your time here – organizational, departmental, programs, buildings – you were only here thirty-some years, Greg.

G.T.: Where do I start?

R.B.: It’s very open-ended.

G.T.: I think the most significant change that has been on campus is our becoming a university; and I forget what year it was – 1976 or so? Uh, something like that – and we became a university. I don’t think that this caused us to change radically in any way. We were a college one day and a university the next. In the perception of people in the public, I think it had a profound effect. Uh, we became a university. Secondly, I think that, uh, let’s see, how many presidents – (inaudible) four or five presidents; and each one brought to his or her – each one brought his or her own agenda to the university. Some faculty and staff viewed as positive, others viewed as negative. Uh, the most positive that I have seen is the current president, but then she’s been here four years and perhaps the honeymoon is not over. I think that every one of those presidents has gone through a period when his – I’ll use “his” here because I exclude the president because they were all men. Uh, each one of them went through a period when they were looked at askance by faculty and staff. Some went through votes of confidence; some went through near votes of confidence. Uh, there’s always, uh, ups and downs among the universities. We all have problems, uh, a lot of them brought on us by the legislature. Oh, speaking of legislature and speaking of problems, I think that another development or change was when we started dropping enrollment – when our enrollment went down. And at that time, Dr. Harrington was the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and he – he did his best to maintain the faculty that he had. Some of the things that came up then were not popular. One of them was going off campus. A lot of people had thought – uh, had always looked at the university as a self-contained unit in Ellensburg, Washington. He save faculty positions by sending them out to the hinterlands. And, uh, now that has grown into a very well accepted program. But it was, I believe, at some cost to Dr. Harrington. That was a profound change in the structure of the university; and we’ve all lived through changes in the colleges and schools that we have had over the years. You have been through title change after title change in your department. Uh, others have had the same experience. I don’t know what effect that we had on the how students or what they were offered. Uh, I think that perhaps the departments and schools involved thought that by changing titles, they would be perceived in a different light and perhaps attract more students; or, perhaps, focus the mission of their departments or colleges more precisely. Let’s see – oh, we had a (inaudible) changes in titles. The Dean of Students became the Vice President of Student Affairs and, uh, let’s see – We have had some buildings – major buildings on – built on campus since I got here. Uh, we have had at least three fires. And, uh, in the last few years, and I’m not sure that I could say that this is during the time that I was with the institution, because I retired in ’99. Uh, but there have been two beautiful buildings – Science Hall, the new science building and Black Hall have been constructed. I think that’s about all I can recall right now.

R.B.: Okay. What about particularly proud moments for the university – proud moments of the university.
G.T.: Well I think one of the really proud moments was becoming a university. And, uh, a lot of that we owe to the then President, Jim Brooks, and the Board of the Trustees that he worked with. Other proud moments: We have had, um, athletic teams that have done the university proud. Uh, those are not all academic – I’m sorry – sports activities are not always perceived as part of the university mission by the – by some of the faculty. And for a good part of the student body, those were proud moments, not necessarily for everyone. I think that the construction of those two buildings – those are proud moments. And then, of course, the new music building. Uh, I don’t know who – I’m not sure who gets credit for those buildings, in terms of presidents. I know that two or three presidents claim them. But, uh, I don’t know who really to attribute – to give the credit to. Other proud moments – I think that, uh, some of the students that we have – we produced, have gone on to become outstanding citizens. We have students who became college presidents. We have students who became – have done well in the political arena. One of the ones that stands out is the current County Executive, uh, King County. And, I’m sure that – I’m sure that he will advance even more. I’m sure that on the political scene, he’s going to be a representative for the State of Washington – perhaps in Washington, D.C. There are others that I know have done well. Each department can lay claim to having produced outstanding scholars, outstanding practitioners, outstanding professionals; and, uh, we will continue to do that.

R.B.: Okay. What was your perception of the students’ capabilities when first arrived and when you retired? Any change or significant changes?

G.T.: Uh, we tend to – Um, I’ll back up a little bit – Uh, student capabilities? I think that we have always had outstanding students. We have always had students who didn’t make it. We have always had students who became, as I said a minute ago, very good practitioners, very good professionals, very good politicians. We have always had them. We have had scholars who have been of the highest caliber. We have had students who have been, uh, out of place at this institution or would be the same at any other institution. We tend to measure capabilities of an incoming class by looking at test scores, high school G.P.A.’s, an index which is comprised of the two. And, uh, over the last several years, we have been pointing at the fact that the high school G.P.A.’s and the test scores of our students have been going up – the average G.P.A.’s. But that’s – at the same time, we’ve also had more and more students enrolling at Central – many of them we couldn’t take. So, what do we do? We take this whole group of students coming in and we chop off the bottom. That automatically raises the average G.P.A. – the average score. So, I cannot be sure that we have done much better over the years – say twenty years ago to now. Now, another thing that is at play in this area is great inflation, not here, but at the high schools. Uh, there used to be a gentlemen’s “C.” That’s no longer the case. If you get a “C,” you’re the pits, and as a result, uh, A’s and B’s have become common. It is not news when a high school has G.P.A.’s – uh, several students with G.P.A.’s at 4.0, or several valedictorians. Um, they come to school and then we can claim we have so many valedictorians, we have so many people with 4.0 G.P.A.’s. Again, is it the capability rising or have we, uh, used statistics to, uh, describe ourselves more – describe ourselves in a better way. I think that we will have students who will continue that are excellent students. We’ll continue to have students that continue to come to Central that are just getting by. We’ll always – We’ve always had them. We always will have them. Now, there’s no doubt in my mind that uh, there are some schools in this state that attract the better scholars because of – primarily reputation schools. The best students – and again, because they’re chopping off the bottom – go to the University of Washington. They are probably better prepared than a lot of students we get. It used to be that WSU got to the – was the second tier. Uh, in the last few years that I was here, I noticed that it’s no longer the second tier, Western Washington has become the secondary school – the additional flagship institution, so to speak. And they accomplished it the same way - uh, chop off the bottom. WSU has been doing that for years, as well. And I’ve heard – And I’ve heard for years and years that uh, among our faculty and some of our staff, that Central should take great pains to “up” the quality of our students – that is, chop off that bottom just like the other institutions have done. Well, that’s great if you can stand the heat after that, because the fewer students we have, the fewer faculty we’re going to need; the fewer faculty, the fewer funds are going to come our way and there will be heck to pay. And I’m not sure that the faculty and staff could stand that kind of heat. There goes another president!

R.B.: (chuckle) Do you feel that Central provides ample cultural enrichment for students?
G.T.: Uh, I – I’m kind of, uh, wishy-washy on that situation *(inaudible)*. Um, certainly we have, over the last few years, had a number of foreign students that have come to this campus – uh, Japanese, Chinese, and that adds to the cultural enrichment of the university. We have had more minority students coming to the campus. That adds to the cultural milieu of the institution. We have had *(coughing – inaudible)* programs where students can go off and study for a year or so in one of our sister institutions or other institutions in South America, Europe, the Orient, the countries of China, Japan – uh, that adds to the cultural maturity of our students. Uh, on campus, we have promoted – especially in the residence halls – activities that will culturally enrich students. Unfortunately, not all of those activities are taken up by all of our students. To many of our students, the Saturday night party is still the primary cultural activity; and perhaps that will change some day. But, uh, that’s been the situation ever since I was a freshman. Yes, the university has made – and I think there have been strides. I think that, uh, more can be done. What those activities should be, I don’t know and, of course, culture is always changing, so what is enriching today may be passé tomorrow. Then we’ll have other things that would add to the cultural development of students.

R.B.: What about some of your personal contributions to your shop or to the university, as a whole? What are you most proud of, is another way of asking, Greg.

G.T.: I, uh - This is a difficult question for me to answer because I am a very private person. I don’t know if you knew that. Uh, but I tend to be a very private person. You know, I’ve always – unlike presidents of institutions who will take credit for everything that comes their way – buildings, faculty, money, etc. – I’ve always felt that the people who should get the credit for what they’re – for the achievements of the university, are the people who make them come about. The people who have done wonders with students in the Residents’ Halls are the people who make them happen. The people who manage to come up with additional money for student aid – that should be the Director of Financial Aid – and in each instance across the student services and, uh, even across some departments – academic departments – uh, I felt that to take away credit from them, to bring one’s name to the fore – I didn’t think that was honest, so I never – I can’t point to any one thing that I think I have contributed, because they have not been my contributions. What I’m proud of, I guess, is the fact that, uh, those people who made things happen at this institution, they’re the ones, at least when I was able to do so, they got the credit.

R.B.: And finally, will you give us a statement that wraps up your feelings about your time at Central?

*(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 2)*

R.B.: Okay. I’m sorry.

G.T.: That’s alright. I think, uh, that one year turned into a very, very good thirty years. Ups and downs, yes. Uh, personnel people that I didn’t care for, yes. But, uh, all in all, I’m glad I spent those – I’m glad I spent those years here. And, uh, if I had to do it again, I’d do it again.

R.B.: Well, thank you, Greg Trujillo. You’re a good person. We appreciate it. End of interview.