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**[START OF TRANSCRIPT]**

**[0:00:01] James:** This is James Taylor interviewing Dr. Don Livingston for the history of the Political Science department April 27<sup>th</sup> 2017. Good morning Dr. Livingston?

**[0:00:12] Dr. Livingston:** Good morning Mr. Taylor.

**[0:00:18] James:** So can you describe to me how you got to this point of teaching at Western Carolina University, how did you get to the school, why education and what had your interest in Political Science to lead you here?

**[0:00:29] Dr. Livingston:** I'll be glad to, I got my Bachelors and Masters at the University of South Carolina. Uh, way back, uh, in you know in the, uh, late 60s early 70s. I ended up at Ole Miss University of Mississippi for my PhD in Political Science. And my four areas were American Government and Politics, uh, Public Administration and at last Relations in public Law. You had to have four areas of concentration in those days. Uh, when I was at Ole Miss Dr. Gordon Mercer, uh, who retired a few years ago and became here, the head of the department, I think around 1980 or so he was my major professor. He was also my dissertation director and he left Ole Miss and came here. And when he left to come here he supervised the graduate teaching assessments at Ole Miss in our department at that time and I was one of them? And, uh, he said he felt I was doing a really good job and he was interested and maybe at some point getting me to Western Carolina University and proposed on the South Carolina board **[0:01:38 inaudible]** Dr. Mercer also helped me get my first job out in Oklahoma. And another interesting point about Dr. Mercer but one of my major professors Dr. Larson the University of South Carolina when he heard I was going to Ole Miss for my PHD, he pulled me aside and said "Look up to Gordon Mercer, " I said "I know him and he's a great professor and a good man and I'll look him up when you get there." And I did and really Dr. Mercer did a fabulous job in terms classroom teaching there. And he had also a great mentor to a number of us there and I thought he was being nice to me when he said that you know, I can get you to Western Carolina University at some point.

**[0:02:22]** So he helped me get my first job in Oklahoma and I was there several years, I got a call from Dr. Mercer and he was here and he said that

there was an opening if you're interested apply for it. I did. Of course had to go through all the process of interviewing and all of that and ended up here at Western in 1984. And, uh, really it felt very fortunate to be at Western Carolina University and I'm on **[0:02:49 fake]** retirement now, and being here thirty something years and I feel that I've been blessed to teach at Western. My wife got a masters here but both my boys got their undergraduate degrees here and my youngest son got his masters here. So we are Western Carolina University family. So that's how I ended up here. I had, you know, been at Western Carolina University because we used to vacation in the mountains, in the Great Smoky Mountains, so I was familiar with the school and, uh, I really appreciated Dr. Mercer that he could give me an opportunity to come to Western.

**[0:03:27] James:**

When you first arrived at the political science department and public affairs, can you describe what it was like... what the department was like, how big it was?

**[0:03:38] Dr. Livingston:**

Mm-hmm. Yeah, I got here and it was Dr. Mercer, uh, Dr. Charles Stevens, with Dr. Bill Lademer, uh, and then the, uh, we had, uh, several part time agile faculty at that point. And then later were able to hire Dr. Ken Wayne and he was a tremendous addition to our department, a real asset, and he stayed a number of years before he headed up at the University of Texas at Tyler. His wife was from, uh, Texas at Waco, and she wanted to get back home and but we hated to lose him, so it was a very small department at that time. Uh, just a few fulltime faculty and, uh, then some agile faculty, uh, everybody got along, it was, uh, it was uh, real pleasure to work in the department, professor Latimer in particular, uh, was so helpful to me, uh, you know cause we taught in Nashville with the graduate program. And I taught in that program as well and built out a **[0:04:45 inaudible]**. You know he, uh, gave me a, a lot of advice and suggestions about things in Nashville and uh, he, uh, he was just so kind to me. Dr. Stevens I think he was you know, uh, the smartest one in the department, he was a real scholar due to graduate PhD, uh, just a wonderful person, it was great to work with him and it was great to work with Dr. Mercer, who had been my mentor, you know there at Ole Miss.

**[0:05:17] James:**

Can you describe as, um... how you spent time here and, and built up your time as a professor. Can you tell me some of you... how the department has changed over those years?

**[0:05:28] Dr. Livingston:**

Oh, Mr. Taylor, we have grown, we have really grown, you know how many full time faculty we have now. I can't give you the exact number but we have, uh, I think more than doubled in size. Since I came here in 1984, I think when I came here in '84 there were 3000 and something students and I think now we have to what? Ten thousand more students here at Western Carolina University, the campus has changed quite a bit. Our curriculum, our program has changed over time you know. I, uh, the leadership, we have today with Dr. Cooper who we know is being the department's head and, uh, Dr. Collins being the director of the public policy institute. Dr. **[0:06:07 Barley Lash]** being the director of the MPA, Master of Public Administration program. Uh, you know Dr. Richard Stein, he's in the History department, the dean of our college. He used to be my former student by the way. Uh, the leadership is just outstanding; I don't think that our department has ever been stronger than it is now. And the department has a bright future here **[0:06:30 inaudible]** we've got so many outstanding younger faculty and they're just doing a superb job. It is such a pleasure to work with them and yeah things have really changed in terms of size you know in the department and it's a young department and uh, they're just doing great things.

**[0:06:53] James:**

Can you tell me some of uh mm, the changes... I understand that the school is growing and stuff but specifically the political science department whether it be curriculum or staff or just things like that, which required the students. Can you tell me how you've change some of that stuff over your... while you've been here and why you did that?

**[0:07:19] Dr. Livingston:**

Well, you know we've made a number of changes in the curriculum of course. When I first got here we had areas of concentration, we dropped that. We've in recent years focused more on methodologies, statistics, you know, uh, at one time we talked about dropping the BA degree but I didn't agree with that and we were able to keep it, you know just to a BS degree, undergraduate degree. Um, you know, uh, but thinking in the department, the, uh, more emphasis is today on research and scholarship and publication. So that's good, I think we still see teaching as being on our top priority though and our department has always had traditions service.

**[0:08:03]**

Uh, so you know, uh, today you know it's a different ball game than when I came in 1984 and uh, and, and things evolve, things change and our department has changed well along with it. Uh, our majors, we used to have, uh, a smaller number of majors, we now have a much larger number of majors. Uh, you know, so there is a change. Uh, I'm just

trying to think about some other things in terms of changes that have taken place, so um, our MPA program has really grown, uh--

**[0:08:44] James:** Can you expand it a little bit on that, um, you mentioned that the political science department is always had a service--

**[0:08:50] Dr. Livingston:** Mm-hmm.

**[0:08:50] James:** Can you expand on that a little bit.

**[0:08:52] Dr. Livingston:** Yeah, we you know, we have three links to the school so to speak. Uh, teaching, referred/scholarship and service and we serve our department on committees and task forces, we serve our college, you know for example I served on any number of committees of our department, our faculty they serve on various committees in campus and what have you and in the departmental level, the college level and at the university level. We used to call them TPR Tenure Promotion reappointment committees collegial review committee I think. And, uh, you know our department has history of tradition of our good service to our college, uh, to out department to uh, the university staff, to uh, our region our community and our students and we do a good job there.

**[0:09:45] James:** Getting away a little bit from the department, can you tell me, were there any major national political issues that directly affected **[0:09:52 Co Ed]** the student to faculty or just the university in general while you have been here?

**[0:09:59] Dr. Livingston:** Not really, not like during the days I've heard some of my former colleagues talk about the Vietnam war and what have you **[0:10:05 inaudible]**. Uh, but, uh, no gains, I mean we've had, uh, well 9/11, I mean that really stands out I mean all of us were shocked, you know the tears, **[0:10:20 inaudible]** weapons and things like that. Uh, you know we've had a situation in Afghanistan and Iraq but we have situation today in the Middle East, Syria. You know we've had a lot happen in the world and in the, uh country but you know and I don't think anything did... well Vietnam war you had to protest and, and that type of thing, I think it takes the campus here but I wasn't here during that point and time, you know that's the 1960's when that was happening. Um, but, um, uh, we've had things happen but you know we're very much aware of what's going on within the state within the region, within the country, world. But, you know, I think we just take things, and stride and move on.

**[0:11:11] James:** Can you tell me about people within Western Carolina University that have affected you in all that you teach and staff?

**[0:11:20] Dr. Livingston:** Yeah, well maybe we learn from one another all the time up here. I've had the pleasure to visit, uh, all my colleagues in their classes and, uh, I think the one that just stands out is Dr. Cooper. And he's an award winning teacher, he's won every award I think he gonna win in terms of teaching, he had recognition for teaching great scholars way of service. Uh, he's a great leader for our department but I've learned so much from Dr. Cooper by going in his classes and observe him teach, he makes it look easy, he's just... he's a gifted teacher. Well, I've learnt from him and of course I've learnt from all my colleagues, all of them you know in terms of how to do a better job in classroom and also I've been able to publish with colleagues here in the department just Dr. Cooper and me and Dr. Collins and you know and others and, uh, it's a learning experience just working with Mercer. Yeah.

**[0:12:20] James:** Dr. Mercer had mentioned that the political science department had summits during those times. Can you talk to me a little bit about those summits?

**[0:12:30] Dr. Livingston:** Oh yeah Dr. Mercer, he was the brainchild of the Public Policy Institute, is still located down our department. Dr. Collins is director of humanity doing a fabulous job but Dr. Mercer came up with this idea about public policy institution a number of years ago. And Dr. Mercer has a great idea man, he also he follows through, he's tenacious, you know once he gets on to something, he really sticks with it and sees it through to the end. And he came up with the idea of the public policy institute and a number of summits have made it with significant numbers of people who'd end up on campus for a day. And the first one he had that were first responders, you know and he... Dr. Mercer has always been a type of guy, he can look into the future and he's a visionary and an idea man and he could identify issues or topics that were important and, uh, he held a number of summits here, was sponsored by the public policy institute and he was amazing Mr. Taylor because with a small staff mostly by undergraduate students with a few graduate students. And grant money and very little funding from the university. I mean he made public policy institution into something spectacular, he really did. And really got Western Carolina University a significant recognition and, uh, he was always on the cutting edge and, uh the summits he held, they were just outstanding. And I mean we've talk about significant, you know I would say probably a thousand more people would descend on campus for a summit and he brought people in from all over the state,

all over the country, uh, and, uh, addressing various topics of significance though, yeah.

**[0:14:21] James:** He had mentioned that he had uh, he had had a summit in 2000 about global terrorism, so I talked about sailing to the future--

**[0:14:31] Dr. Livingston:** Yeah when he had that with, uh, President Carter and uh, you know, I participated in all of those and uh, really uh, **[0:14:39 inaudible]** they were so well done, really commend Dr. Mercer and the staff and mostly student staff to be honest Dr. Gordon Mercer you know he's a great talent scout, he will see students in his class if they had what he needed in that public institute and he would recruit them and, and he gave them a wonderful learning experience because they would pick up on things from Dr. Mercer you'd never learn from a text book, you know both the opportunity to work with him in that public policy institute it was, it was a great opportunity to learn, uh, uh, uh, uh, what... you know and Dr. Mercer was a great teacher.

**[0:15:21] James:** And what direction would you like this department of political science and public affairs to head after your full departure from the school.

**[0:15:29] Dr. Livingston:** The direction we're heading at, like I said a while ago we got some great leadership with Dr. Cooper, Dr. Collins, you know and Dr. Gullet, and, uh, Dr. Michelson when he started the, International studies major. Uh, Dr. Sheeve I think he's director of that program there. Uh, I think our department is just moving in the right direction, I just say, "Keeping on keeping on and full steam ahead." Uh, Dr, Dr, Dr. Cooper just done a fabulous job, he has a lot of energy, uh, and I don't see how he does all he does but I'm telling you he leads by example. And, uh, I would say, "Just keep on, keeping on."

**[0:16:09] James:** Okay. Is, um, do you have any stories that should be known for the history of the department, is there any interesting things that you think should be known or just any stories that you think that you should share about the department?

**[0:16:30] Dr. Livingston:** Well, I reckon at the time I was several... well, you know, uh, one of the most courageous man I've ever known is Dr. Charles Stevens. I mentioned him a while ago PhD from Duke. Uh, he was so smart and with such a great dry sense of humor personality. He had several battles of cancer and he finally died of cancer. And uh, you know what an inspiration was to be around that man to... he never complained about anything, um, he was so sick. But, uh, what an inspiration, what a courageous man you know. And he even students who know him well,

one day they came after class... came to me after his class and **[0:17:20 inaudible]**. In classroom cause something is not right, I had to check really, really, during that period and time and the students were really concerned about it, even if they didn't know Mr. Taylor about cancer but they knew something was not right. Uh, but what an inspiration, what a courageous man, one of the most courageous men I've ever known and, uh, um, you know it was such an honor to work with him. Dr. Mercer just watching him operating in terms of being a visionary and idea man and his neck was just reaching out and they find issues and in terms of the future. Uh, you know the story in itself there, um, how he just made things happen, you know, uh, and that was fascinating watch.

**[0:18:09]**

Uh Dr. Professor Latimer you know when I first came here, uh, I'm telling you he had award winning teacher, uh, um, all kinds of stories about Professor Latimer you know, uh, um, he had students who did us really admired him and, uh, you know he was a mentor to so many, um, some of the student I never... had a young lady, uh, who was in our program Nashville, American young lady and so smart and Miss. Grant was her name and, uh, she got a full ride, I think at Chapel Hill for the Law School. You know I never get enough time, some of the students were talking about what they would do during the break, some of them going skiing in Colorado and uh, I said, Miss. Grant what are you gonna do and she said I'll be behind the cash register in the grocery store in Nashville where she's working. And I just admired that young woman, she was so smart and so industrious and boy she's done so well I am proud of her, I can mention someone like Miss **[0:19:12 inaudible]** I think you may know her.

**[0:19:15] James:**

Yeah.

**[0:19:15] Dr. Livingston:**

You know just one of the sharpest students that we've ever had you know. Uh, we've had just so many, uh, **[0:19:22 inaudible]** of graduate students. Um, just so many but wonderful students and men and women, uh, Mr. Taylor like you are industrious hardworking you know what a joy it is to be with you all in the classroom and, uh, so glad I passed crossed in this life but I just met so many wonderful people. Um, you know um, in terms of, of the department, yeah, lots of good stories, lots of good memories there.

**[0:19:56] James:**

Well, thank you for choosing **[0:19:57 inaudible]** stopping right off a few years.

**[0:20:01] Dr. Livingston:**

You're welcome.

**[0:20:01] James:** Um, can you tell me why you were interested in political science or or--

**[0:20:09] Dr. Livingston:** Yeah, yeah I'll be glad to yeah, I was... I started Clifton in 1965, I dropped out and I was out for three years and finally went back to school, uh, but I realized I needed to get a college degree and uh, I was, I was soul searching for a major Mr. Taylor, and I tried business, I tried this and that and I got into political science class because you know the **[0:20:34 inaudible]** political studies back then **[0:20:37 inaudible]** General Ed or something like that. And I was in this professor's class doing political scientist in South Carolina University and, uh, he really inspired me and I realized also this is what I... this is the major I've been looking for. That's how I ended up in political science. And just sort of you know found my way to political science, uh, I talked to one of those people who knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. And I was really naïve when I went to college and, uh, and, uh, you know I just, uh, well started at three years and went away it was a good deal because I've lived some life and I found some things out that I knew I did wanna do and I realized the value of a college education and just had the opportunity to go back. In Clifton, I was okay as a student I did have a great point and average, in fact I had to go to the University of South Carolina on probation. You know I was just naïve and, and, uh, and, uh, uh, got into the University of South Carolina, there was a gentleman a former member of the board of trustees called him on my behalf, you know because I had to go back on probation and I'll never forget he looked at me sitting there young man. He said, "You'll be accepted, uh, I made this call." And he said, "I want you to take advantage of this opportunity, a second chance I've helped you with." And he looked at me, he said, "You pass it along, don't you forget somebody gave you a second chance and you pass it along." And James, uh, that really stuck with me, you know. I really appreciated that.

**[0:22:21] James:** Mm-hmm. Very fortunate.

**[0:22:22] Dr. Livingston:** Yeah, very fortunate.

**[0:22:23] James:** Coz of that you got to share some of your knowledge with me.

**[0:22:27] Dr. Livingston:** Well, I appreciate that.

**[0:22:29] James:** Sir, can you tell me why do you think Political Science should be studied in... and is important and it should continue to be taught?

**[0:22:38] Dr. Livingston:** Oh James, I mean uh, in terms of civics classes, people need to have an understanding of their government, uh, you know people talk an awful



lot about the constitution, I wanna have... many of them haven't actually read the constitution. I mean samples have indicated their folks thinking the bill of rights, do you have right? You know that type of thing, I think people need to be aware of their government and they need to be aware of the institutions that propel their development. They need to be... you know they need to understand it, not only do you have rights as American Citizens that you have duties and responsibilities as a citizen. You know what's not right but you have duties and responsibilities. Uh, freedom is not free, uh, you know a lot of people paid all the price in terms of the freedom that we have in this country. Um, James people need to be aware of, of what's going on around them and we need good young people in government, you know a lot of folks don't strictly uh, think much at all about public service. They see politicians as being crooked you know that type of thing. They're not that way, some are but most aren't, there're good descent men and women trying to do a tough job and the public speeches out of the both sides of this map, we don't wanna pay taxes but we want, you know police protection, we want good roads, we want fire protection.

**[0:24:05]**

The people need to be aware of their government and what's going on around them and you know James, we're very fortunate in this country that, uh, you know we are the super power in the world, we are a world leader, uh, we can't put our head in the sand and isolate ourselves from the world. Uh, we have a responsibility, we can't be the world policeman but you know we have a certain responsibility. And, uh, when we need to be aware and informed and involved and participate and uh, civics is so important, I'm afraid today that so many people just, they talk but they don't... maybe they don't really know what they're talking about, you know they need to analyze things and have the analytical skills, uh, but, often times in terms of public opinion they just echo what they've had somewhere else and haven't thought much about it. So it's important, you better believe it. It's our future.

**[0:25:04] James:**

Mm-hmm. So did you, with the public policy institute and just how the department has been ran in general, would you say that... what you just said about the importance of political science, the school follows that and does that good and--

**[0:25:29] Dr. Livingston:**

Oh, yeah, at the University we've done so much in the region, absolutely yeah for the people in North Western Carolina.

**[0:25:37] James:**

Can, you, can you um, expand on that a little bit?

**[0:25:39] Dr. Livingston:** Oh, my gosh I mean just like taking you **[0:25:42 inaudible]** just providing, you know labor force for Western North Carolina but you know education is above social mobility and giving them people to... the state an opportunity to education. You know good education at Western, up at Western, up against any school. We have some great professors here. And, uh, people who care about their students, and uh, you know yes.

**[0:26:12] James:** Um, Dr. Mercer had mentioned that the early classes the MPA program it was being in Nashville that, so this classes were in town hall above the police department and, and fire department, um, and he said that was interesting because he could... he was teaching about local government and local government I was gonna ask what you thought about that.

**[0:26:35] Dr. Livingston:** Oh, absolutely Dr. Mercer made that happen; you know he was the department head and MPA director for a number of years. And again being a visionary, we taught our classes at that point at the University of North Carolina and Nashville Campus. Uh, you know we had smaller classes in those days, just like you asked me a while ago James about our department, in the 1980 and, and, uh, 90s in terms of, of 300 level political science class, we might have ten, twelve, fifteen students and then we have thirty and more in our class and that class size is really changed as well. I think that's great when we teaching local government and through the MPA program, trying to professionalize the public service and in Western North Carolina, uh, and uh, have the opportunity in the MPA program to work alongside and learn from people who were actually out there working in local government. James when I first came here in 1984, I was in the... I taught an MPA program and I was teaching of course Bureaucracy in my first class and that's the first time I taught graduates course in Oklahoma but I taught anyways. But I had a lady who had been in the Red Cross for 30 something years and James, I teach her about bureaucracy that she didn't already know--

**[0:27:52] James:** Yeah.

**[0:27:53] Dr. Livingston:** You know and, and our students in our MP program, they have an opportunity, some go straight it after they finish doing the graduate grade, some wait a while, some update the work force but you're in a classroom with people who were actually out there, you know working in local government, state government and what have you, law enforcement. And it's a great way to learn you know to have an opportunity to be around associate with people like that, and Dr.

Mercer made it possible for us to have our classes in some of these, uh, buildings you know which these people were in, uh, it was a good idea.

**[0:28:31] James:**

Are there any... are there any other major things that happened while you've been here that affected how the political science department is today such as, other than significant faculties has... have you got support from administration and stuff like that?

**[0:28:56] Dr. Livingston:**

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, we've always done a good job, you know to cultivate our tab with the administration to college level and university level and also with people beyond the boundaries of Western, you know, with the law makers what have you. We have a great report like that and always said no to; to have a friend you gotta be a friend. You know and we realized that the policy of the situations and the importance to cultivate and build a report with people outside the department. But in relationships matter you probably heard me say that in class before but relationships matter and they are so important.

**[0:29:44] James:**

Is there anything else that you would like to add--

**[0:29:49] Dr. Livingston:**

Not that I can think off, I tell you James, I'm impressed with some of the questions that you come up with, you put some time and thought and effort into this and I'm just really impressed by the way you have structured this interview and the questions that you have asked and, uh, I really wanna commend you, I'm so proud of you, I've had you in class in several occasions and I've always admired you because you're such a sincere young man and you are such a hard worker and, uh, you know that's what separates the men from the boys, you know, uh, you're someone who's willing to put the time and effort into it and you've always stand out and I'm so proud of you.

**[0:30:29] James:**

Well, I appreciate it. Well.

**[0:30:31] Dr. Livingston:**

**[0:30:31 That's it].**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**