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Interview with Margaret Williamson

Margaret Williamson

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WILLIAMSON, Margaret
Undergraduate, Assistant Dean of University College

At Winthrop: 1972-1976, 1980,
Interviewed:  October 2, 2014
Interviewer:  Rebecca Nave
Index by:  Breion James
Length:  30 minutes

Abstract: In her October 2nd interview with Rebecca Nave, Margaret Williamson speaks of her time at Winthrop University during its transition into a coed institution. She talks of her involvement in various student organizations and athletics. She also talks of the changes in Winthrop, diversity wise, from when she was a student in 1974 to an employee at Winthrop today. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Winthrop University, Diversity, Student Life, Coeducation

Interview Session (October 2, 2014): Digital File

Time                 Keywords
00:00:00             Start of Interview/Interviewer’s Introduction
00:00:25             Question: When did you attend Winthrop? Answer: Undergraduate, 1972-1976
00:00:33             Question: Did you attend anything after undergraduate? Answer: Yes, got Master’s at Winthrop in 1980.
00:00:39             Question: Why Winthrop? Answer: Senior English teacher was great and attended Winthrop. I wanted to go south to play golf because of the weather. I wanted to major in Communications and Winthrop had that major. I liked the campus and people when I did my college tour.
00:01:20             [no question] You studied communications. Answer: Yes
00:01:27             Question: What was your minor? Answer: Political Science
Question: Has the image of Winthrop changed since you studied here as an undergraduate? Answer: Yes, tremendously.

Question: What are the top things that changed? Answer: Coeducation and diversity

Question: When you mean diversity, what would say typically is the rule of thumb for the change? Answer: Mostly white females from South Carolina

[no question] Now you would say it’s all over the board. Answer: Racially in terms of sexual orientation, gender identification, completely different institution

Question: Do you think that if it were this way you time here as an undergraduate, it would have been better? Answer: Probably

Question: What is your current role and Winthrop? Answer: Assistant Dean of University College. I work with undeclared majors, students who are on academic probation, and faculty and staff send emails in regards to students not coming to class, not turning in assignments, etc.

Question: Did you participate in any athletics on campus? Answer: Golf freshmen and senior year

Question: Did you play sports before and after coeducation? Answer: Golf was before, but wasn’t affected by coeducation because it was an all female’s golf team.

Question: Were you allowed to date on the weekends? Answer: I was too involved, we were all just friends.

Question: What were the dating rules and regulations at that time period? Answer: You had to stay in the lobby, sign out, and there were curfews. You had a house mother your freshmen year.

Question: Who was president of Winthrop when you attended? Answer: Charles Vail

Question: What was your impression of him? Answer: At that time enrollment was low and residence hall were needed to be closed. I had meetings with him and the impression I got was that he did what he needed to do.

Question: What would you say was his priority of it? Answer: I’m not sure how to answer that.

Question: What did it mean to you to be a student at the college at the time you were
there especially with you being so involved? Answer: I loved Winthrop. I had a wonderful experience. When Winthrop became coed, I developed a lot of friendships with males. It was a big difference between the residence and commuters. Commuters weren’t as involved with campus activities and organizations.

00:08:53 Question: How bad would you say enrollment had gotten during coeducation issue? Answer: It was really bad.

00:09:36 Question: How did you all decide which residence halls to close? Answer: It was based on numbers and to get everyone on one side of campus.

00:10:11 Question: What was the food like? Answer: It was cafeteria style.

00:10:25 Question: What was your stance on the coeducation issue? Answer: I was a realist. It was a practical solution that helped us stay alive.

00:10:39 Question: How did you feel about guys coming on campus, and did the absence of males sway your decision to attend Winthrop? Answer: I don’t remember choosing Winthrop because it was all females. I chose it because I liked the campus and the people. A lot of people were concerned about males being admitted because they felt standards would drop, and there would be a lot of change.

00:12:34 Question: How did the older generation feel about you being on campus with a bunch of guys? Answer: The decision to come to this college was purely my own and I don’t remember my parents having an issue with me coming here.

00:13:25 Question: With your friends at Winthrop, were there any issues with men influencing their social lives? Answer: It surprised me of how many of my classmates went home on the weekends.

00:14:32 Question: Who did you feel to be the most important actors in opposition to coeducation and working in favor of coeducation? Answer: Lynda Loy, Class of 1974, who was student government president at the time. There were a lot of students against because they were worried about traditions. The board was in favor of.

00:17:09 Question: What was your experience with coeducation, it impact after it happened on enrollment? Answer: There weren’t a lot of men that enrolled. There weren’t any men sports so they came gradually.

00:18:05 Question: Do you remember when men’s sports became a part of Winthrop. Answer: It was in the late 70’s.

00:18:38 Question: From the time you graduated, from working in admissions, did you notice
an enrollment trend or diversity increase? Answer: Definitely, more gender than anything.

00:18:58 Question: Were there any impact on race? Answer: I’m sure there were but none that I know of. There certainly weren’t any from a diversity stance.

00:19:36 Question: Were they accepted and were there any problems with black men and white women type of things? Answer: Not that I am aware of.

00:19:49 Question: What about the men’s impact on the workforce? Answer: No real impact, there were male faculty members. Tom Web was Director of Student Activities.

00:20:28 Question: If men had not been here, do you feel as though your experience would have been impacted? Answer: I doubt that it would have changed the experience.

00:21:08 Question: Do you feel as though the college lost its conservatism, the way they dressed or their behavior? Answer: Some students started dressing better when the guys came.

00:21:50 Question: With the males coming, did they act less conservative or did things to get the males attention? Answer: There were some but not really.

00:23:00 Question: Do you have some speculation as to why it did take so long for coeducation at Winthrop? Answer: South Carolina is a very conservative state.

00:23:12 Question: Do you feel like its conservative in the way of gender? Answer: In every way. Back then families wanted places they could send their daughters and not have men around.

00:23:52 Question: Do you have any specific experience or memory that stuck with you after all this time about coeducation? Answer: Mike Luday and Dale Gill were great guys and got involved in class activities.

00:24:22 Question: Was there ever a controversial event? Answer: No

00:24:31 Question: What would you say is the overall impact in how it influenced Winthrop today? Answer: Just the fact that we are a coed institution, it was inevitable and was going to have to happen.

00:25:15 Question: What do you think was the opening to the door of how diverse we are? Answer: After I graduated, things changed dramatically, classes went away, traditions changed and it was hard to see because we had enjoyed our experience so much. It became more of sports etc.
00:25:56  Question: On two sides of a scale to what you lost as far as tradition and gaining of men, would you say they balanced out or one greater than the other?  Answer: I’m glad I was here when we had the traditions and classes.

00:26:36  Question: What was your favorite previous tradition that got lost?  Answer: There were two classes’ night and follies.

00:26:47  Question: What was that?  Answer: Classes’ night, you skits, make costumes, and write your skits to go with it. You would compete against the other classes. It was a big thing in Byrnes. Follies was just a big production the junior class did in the spring.

00:27:26  Question: During this time, were there any religious undertones or general rule, religiously?  Answer: There were a lot of southern Baptist.

00:28:06  Question: Do you think that as a religious aspect, was that reflected directly in the traditions of your everyday life or did you have to go to Sunday Chapel?  Answer: No

00:28:39  Question: As far as what you did for coeducation, did anybody have any opposition towards you and what you were doing?  Answer: Not that I remember.

00:29:19  No Question: The greatest change you’ve seen here at Winthrop other than the diversity?  Answer: The entire student body, obviously the buildings have changed, the academic programs, it’s a very different institution.

00:29:40  Question: Do you think Winthrop does more for the community now?  Answer: Yes, I would say that. The students are more involved in outreach to the community than we were.

00:29:55  Question: Why do you think that is?  Answer: I think that it’s because of a push from Winthrop, their beliefs and community service, service learning and that wasn’t as big of deal back in the 70’s.

00:30:12  Question: When do you think that change happened?  Answer: It wasn’t while I was here.

00:30:34  End of Interview