

# Laura Wilson-Gentry Interview

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Oklahoma, teaching, history, medieval history

## SPEAKERS

Interviewer: Elizabeth Epps

Interviewee: Laura Wilson Gentry

### Elizabeth Epps

This is Elizabeth Epps. It is Thursday, December 8, 2022. It's about 2:05 In the afternoon in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm at the University of Baltimore with Professor Laura Wilson Gentry, we're using the online zoom platform. And today we're conducting an oral history interview for the University of Baltimore Stories project, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the university with and through oral history. The purpose of this project is to celebrate the university's centennial by preserving the memory of those influenced by the University of Baltimore. Over the years, we will be creating a digital archive and exhibit and these recordings will be made available online. So today, I'd like to open with a welcome and thank you to Dr. Wilson Gentry.

### Laura Wilson Gentry

Laura.

### Elizabeth Epps

Okay, I will definitely call you, Laura. That was my grandmother's first name. So, I love that. And we're going to dive into first sharing with listeners, what your roles are. And then we're going to dive into some questions. First, I'd like for everyone to know that you are the Associate Dean of the College of Public Affairs, as well as a research associate with the Schaefer Center for Public Policy.

### Laura Wilson Gentry

Mm-hmm, yes.

### Elizabeth Epps

And we're going to dig in right now with questions about your early life prior to the University of Baltimore, and then we'll walk people back to us. So, we're going to ask first, where were you born? And where did you grow up? If that was a different location?

### Laura Wilson Gentry

Well, I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and I actually grew up in the town of Cumberland, Rhode Island.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Okay, and what was life? Like? There? What experiences? Do you remember celebrating the most? Or what formed your early thoughts and perceptions of the world? From that perspective?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Um, oh, that's a really good question. I remember a great deal of being out with my family doing a lot of camping and doing a lot of traveling around the New England area. And I think that really formed my appreciation for locations. And very much for New England. Then, let's see. Yeah, I would say it was more of the traveling with my family. My dad loved going to different locations, and he was a huge history fanatic. So I think that also informed a lot of my interest, which I did pass along to my children.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Okay. So, what were some of your favorite places as a child visiting, or that you have memories of, of celebrating travels to and from?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Colonial Williamsburg was a big one. We always used to like to go up to Cape Cod, and up into the mountains of Vermont, New Hampshire. I think instead, I haven't been to- well, no, I have been to Maine as well.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So, you know, the area extremely well.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yes, I do.

**Elizabeth Epps**

And so I'm assuming that you attended school there for K through 12. Is that correct?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

That is correct.

**Elizabeth Epps**

And what was school like for you? What did you find yourself most attracted to everybody always likes to know what subjects grabbed you the most and which ones made you turn and say "no, no, never, never, never, never again?"

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Wow. Um, well, when I was originally growing up, we lived in a town called North Providence, Rhode Island, which was very blue collar very working class, and moved to Cumberland, which was far more suburban.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Okay.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

One of the things that really struck me was the way people were perceived differently. Having come from North Providence, matter of fact, I was told by one of my English teachers in high school, he told my mother that I was functionally illiterate, because I hadn't been taught grammar the way he thought I should have been taught. So that was a real experience that formed me to want to go out and learn writing and writing skills. My favorite subject was history.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Your favorite subject was history. My goodness, that's beautiful. When, when you were in high school, and you developed this eye for zoning in on your writing ability, and you had this love for history, and this passion for history, were you attracted to all genres of history or specific genres, maybe relating to where you lived? Or some of the travels, and things that you experienced with your family? Did you? Did you ever venture out from beyond?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Oh, definitely. My focus in and still a very big focus is medieval history, particularly medieval English and French and colonial history. Those who are my two big areas.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Fascinating.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

The genre within history that really, really attracts my attention is something that's called material history.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Okay.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

It is how people lived, how people did things in, you know, those eras.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So very practical applications of things before and after industry. Like, you know, innovation comes just by doing sometimes innovation comes with the advent of new technology. But when you look at medieval history, and you think of how people did things, there were changes that were experienced throughout that great gap of time, or that great span of time, but I'm guessing that you probably questioned, not just what they were doing and how they were doing things. But when things changed, what precipitated the change? Correct?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Correct. But actually, I, I am a hand spinner and a hand waver by application. And I think a lot of that reach it was motivated reaches back into that love of material history.

**Elizabeth Epps**

When you were preparing for college, how much of your personal interests dictated the school that you went to? And What school did you decide to go to? And what program did you enroll in?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Um, I went to the University of Rhode Island,

**Elizabeth Epps**

Okay.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

And I went there with the intent of studying history. But when I went there, that was also during the advent of Watergate. And I got really pulled into political science and looking much more at the politics of the moment. So, I decided to pursue a major in political science. Actually, I have a major in political science, theoretical economics and medieval history from URI.

**Elizabeth Epps**

My goodness. That is amazing.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Oh, thank you.

**Elizabeth Epps**

That is truly amazing. You, you basically transitioned so much of your personal interests into all of your studies.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yeah, I mean, it was kind of- I went down to URI and almost turned on a dime out of history into political science.

**Elizabeth Epps**

That is truly exciting. So, from there, you went on to get a master's degree. Tell us about that experience where you went, what that major entailed.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Okay. Originally, I wanted to stay at URI for my Master's in Public Administration. But what happened was I had applied for a scholarship; I don't believe it's active anymore. The New York State Legislative award and it was called a Layman fellow named after Governor Layman of New York. And what they offered was essentially free tuition at a state university state, a university in the SUNY system. And ah, then the universities competed among themselves to get the Ayman fellows so the university I ended up going to the University at Albany, threw in my tuition, and I mean, my room and board, okay, so I ended up going and doing a um, my degree in criminal justice, SUNY Albany. Now I think it's just called the university at Albany.

**Elizabeth Epps**

How were, how were your studies there? What grabbed you the most about what you were exposed to? What was the climate at the institution like while you attended the school? And what were you thinking in terms of walking into the next chapter of your life? Like the future of your life? Were you giving much thought to where you'd be in 10 years? Or were you more focused on letting your studies lead you?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Um, while I was at Albany at the time, that was one of the top three schools in criminal justice. So, it had an air where it really pushed you to strive. They wanted, you know, their graduates to make a name for themselves. What I learned at SUNY Albany of what I learned in that school is that criminal justice was not what I wanted to focus on. I enjoyed, the classes, I actually took a class on the history of the prison system, which I thought was fascinating. But I, they did something in one of the classes that really kind of shocked me and they use police training videos.

Well, you have to pretend that you are an officer with a gun and make the split-second decision, whether or not to use lethal force. The last video that they showed, yes, every, everyone turned around and shot what you thought was the assailant and turns out it was a fellow police officer. And that really struck me. And I think at that moment, I decided, no, this is not for me. I was also engaged to my first husband at the time, so my future was more focused on you know, getting married and establishing that relationship. He had been accepted to the University of Oklahoma. So, we moved out to Norman, Oklahoma.

**Elizabeth Epps**

And what was lifelike for you? In a new state, portion of the United States that you hadn't lived in previously, I'm assuming, and you're starting this new life. And from what I understand you dive into additional studies.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Eventually. When I first moved to Oklahoma, the agreement was we would see him through, I was a little burnt out on school. So, we would see him through his degree, and that I would work for a few years and get some experience. So shortly after we got there, I worked for the Oklahoma legislature.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Ah, so that's where the political science leanings kicked in.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yes. And actually, staffed committees dealing with criminal justice issues. And really not thinking where I was going to go next. After a while, Oklahoma disbanded its, it was called the Bureau of Legislative Research. And I was junior, so I lost my job. But eventually, I ended up working at the Office of Institutional Research in the Provost Office at Oklahoma. And, and my assignment was to the Associate Provost for budgeting, and I, I hated statistics and math up until that point in time, once the job required that you start working more with, like, spreadsheet, information. All of a sudden, I fell into it, and I really began to love the work. Which is ironic, because by the time I finished my graduate school I had the equivalent of a master's in Applied Statistics.

**Elizabeth Epps**

That's incredible.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

It just really grabbed me. I found that this is something I wanted to do. Oklahoma itself was an extremely different experience. Um, my first husband was indigenous. So being in a marriage of a Caucasian woman with a charity was something that was still very much frowned upon, particularly if you went outside of Norman was

fairly liberal. So, that was the first time I really encountered something like that. And, you know, because of that we did not stray much out of the Oklahoma City Metroplex.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So culturally, you felt the impact of boundaries around you?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yes, I did. And began to understand, even though I was the majority member in this relationship, I was at least seeing in my partner, what discrimination meant, and how it affected him.

**Elizabeth Epps**

And how it affected him. How did those experiences inform or inspire you to your next set of goals and accomplishments, in addition to that, the political climate of the time had to be impactful as well, you know, just absorbing all of the change that was experience across the nation as well as in the world at the time. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Are you comfortable?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

It- well, I'm trying to think how I would phrase this. It definitely in formed my belief in equality, that there is sometimes institutional racism. And that those were- not sure how to phrase this. These were issues that were very much faced by a large number of our- a large proportion of our society. And so, because of that, I think that's what attracted me into what became my main research area, which was social welfare policy. So, as I began doing more and more research, that's where I went, um, my ex-husband and I, moved to New Mexico. I lived there for a year and worked as an assistant to the provost at Eastern New Mexico University. And while there, we divorced, and I decided I was going to go back for my doctorate.

And I was looking at two universities, University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Oklahoma, and Oklahoma had a DPA program. Okay, and that really fit my where I wanted to go, I really did not want to do, at that time, political science. Because political science degrees at that time, were more survey degrees, you had to take so many hours in political theories, so many hours in international relations. That wasn't what I wanted to do. So, Oklahoma had this parallel degree called the DPA and the focus, there was more on management techniques, evidence base data information. So, it was much more applied. And so that and the fact that Oklahoma was willing to give me in state tuition, that may be the difference.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Yes, often times and amount of support can never be taken for granted. And when you are faced with accomplishing such a large goal, tuition is necessarily a part of the deciding, you know, it comes into the conversation in the deciding that at some point. And we can all certainly appreciate that. What were your studies like? How did you enjoy the University of Oklahoma? What challenges did you face and what is what would you say is one of your biggest positive takeaways from your experience?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Um, I really enjoyed OU. as, particularly as a student as opposed to an administrator. They're some really, very good friends. We really, you know, staying up until the middle of the night working on studies working on projects together. So, I really enjoyed that aspect. I learned to appreciate the culture of Oklahoma much more.

Particularly one of my closest friends in graduate school, was an Arapaho lady. And so, unlike my ex-husband, who really did not immerse himself as much in the Native American culture until really, until very late in his time at Oklahoma, this lady Virginia, she was taking me to pow-wows, just got a chance to really see much more of the culture than I did my first round at OU. What I really enjoyed about Oklahoma, it just really validated me, you know, you come off a divorce, you're not always feeling really confident. Going through the doctoral process. And that really gave me a lot of confidence back. I'm what I'm proud of still there. I did my degree, my doctorate was straight A's, and I passed my general exams with highest distinction.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Oh, my goodness. Congratulation.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I worked at that. That's it. And I met my second husband there, and I'm still married to that one.

**Elizabeth Epps**

It's a fascinating fact. That's also amazing and wonderful. So, what brought you from Oklahoma? The second round to Baltimore and the University of Baltimore. Was there something in Oklahoma that happened to push you to search for new fresh horizons, or?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Well, at the time my fiancé had relocated to Maryland. And he had a job in Montgomery County. And so, I knew I wanted to move back to the East Coast. My family was still in New England. My fiancé was in Maryland. So, I began looking for positions all but dissertation on these notes, and I interviewed at a university, well one in North Carolina, one in South Carolina, and at the University of Baltimore. And I had offers for two of them. And I really wanted to be in Maryland, because my husband by now we were living in different states had a child by his first marriage, and we didn't want to uproot that child again. Because we came from Oklahoma to Maryland, and then potentially having to move him to North Carolina. So, I ended up calling the Chair of the School of Public Affairs and said, I have until this time to, to respond to an offer to this university from North Carolina. Are you at all interested in me?

**Elizabeth Epps**

And what year was this when you posed the question.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

In 1989? Okay. And he said, of course, but the problem is, we're hosting what was the Urban Affairs Association conference and I just haven't had a ton had time to go, you know, pull together everything and contact you with an offer. And somehow, he pulled that offer together within three hours.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Incredible.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

And then I accepted it.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So, this should be a lesson to all of us. Never be afraid of asking the big question and grabbing the bull by the horns, so to speak, and just saying, hey, look, there's a decision that has to be made. I'd like to know where I stand. I'm giving you the microphone. Yeah, that that took incredible- Like that was very gutsy. But a brave and bold, very smart move on your part.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

It Yeah, looking back at it, I'm kind of surprised I did that. But Baltimore in comparison to the other university, actually was better known at the time is work in Political Science and Public Administration. So, it was more of where I wanted to be. And plus, unlike the other university, they threw a computer into the mix. And at the time in 1989, that was a big deal.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So, what was your first position here at the University of Baltimore? And how long did it take for you to shift your life from Oklahoma to UB? Did you do it overnight in an instant?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Um, no. I came here as an assistant professor, all but dissertation. So, in that first year, and I believe my contract was written, that I had to complete the dissertation in the first year. A lot of that first year was learning how to teach, because while I was at Oklahoma, I had research assistantships, but I'd never taught, I was always in a policy institute, doing some form of research.

**Elizabeth Epps**

What did you teach? When you initially came into UB during that first year?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I taught state and local government. I taught statistics, I'm trying to remember what oh, and I taught ethical issues in society.

**Elizabeth Epps**

And that used to be a course that all students at UB, it was known that if you came to UB, you would give it get a heavy dose of education in ethics. It was something that we were, that was one of our flags that we carry. What was that first year like? And what did you learn from it? Give me the highs and lows, because we know that teaching is not an easy job, it takes a period of time to not just hone your craft, but get a pulse on where your students are, how, how easy was that to gauge based on your experience as a researcher? And then how did that prepare you for the years that would come after that?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I- particularly in teaching statistics, which kind of became my signature area, that and research methods. I reached back to the way I was trained at Oklahoma, which is a very applied focus on statistics. They actually had a textbook that was written there, called Applied Statistics for Public Administration. And it was not terribly mathematical, it was much more logically based. It was one of the first textbooks in that area. So I had to learn how to take how I've been trained and translate it into something that I could teach my students so I was on the other side of the podium, and then that took a bit and I had to learn how to adapt to...students that were



nontraditional, okay, because even back then, we had a good cadre of people who worked full time, okay. And I had to adjust and recognize not everyone did their masters and their doctorate the way I did, which was on scholarship, basically. So that was a big adjustment. The other big adjustment I remember reading my evaluations from my first semester was, I wish she wouldn't talk about Oklahoma so much.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Oh, well, oftentimes you do have to recount real experience. is to communicate to the students that you're you that you have a certain amount of relevant information, but that you're also trying to engage them in a way that is more meaningful.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Well, part of what that really came out of my state and local government class. Working with students on the East Coast, they fail to recognize that, for the most part, local government is not a big mayor system, like we have here in Baltimore, or a strong mayor system rather, right. Most of the United States is Council manager, local government. And so, I was trying to use the experience of Oklahoma to do a compare and contrast between, you know, Maryland's strong mayoral systems. And Oklahoma, where the mayor basically is an honorific position. They're the person who's in charge of the city council. So yeah, so I've learned to drop talking about Oklahoma so much, and just used a few examples here and there.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So, once you have completed your first year, you've completed your dissertation. Tell me about your journey after that, because that oftentimes means that you have stepped into new roles or roles of leadership. How did that go for you?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

So, the first five years here at UB, I was really focused on tenure. And so, my first year here at UB, I published five articles, co-authored articles. Okay, and that was with faculty back in Oklahoma. So, they've been in progress. And so, I published them, continued to work on, yeah, continue to work on my research began movement into the Schaefer Center. Okay. And we had a grant at the Schaefer Center that dealt with social policy here in the state of Maryland called the primary prevention initiative. Okay, and the Schaefer Center had pulled together, almost like a multi-University team, there were people from Johns Hopkins on it. The person who became my most prolific co-author came from George Washington University.

And we were looking at the impact of this policy that required parents of school aged children, to have their children attend school a certain percentage of the time. And if they did not, really, if the child was younger, they had to get their vaccinations in a timely manner. And so, this was very, very much in that wave of the mid to late 1990s, where we had moved into a brand new era with social welfare programs. It was more people had to become, I'm trying to come up with the I don't want to use the word, personally responsible, but that's what nationally it was a movement.

So, a lot of these learn fair programs. Maryland was one of the first states that tried health care programs. And that really kind of began moving me more and more into the social welfare work. So, I did a lot with Dr. Thomas. He was the director of the Schaefer Center at that time working on welfare studies and Ann Cotten who's the current director, was also at the Schaefer Center so we were part of that. So, it was a very interesting time. I got to

learn a lot about the social welfare system here. Just the year before I went up for tenure, I was asked to chair the to direct the MPA program. so, I did that for I think about three or four years. And then moved eventually into directing the DPA program. And during that time, I was tenured and promoted to associate.

### **Elizabeth Epps**

So, your life changed a great deal. While teaching here at the University of Baltimore, what was the University of Baltimore, like during that time? And what changes did you experience positive? Or otherwise? And what were the students like? What was what were the students interested in? How were they tapping into national or global issues? And what was the response of the administration here? In terms of, you know, tailoring programs, and extracurricular events to kind of capture what essentially has probably evolved to be the UB brand- or the things that we are now continuing to hold on to and celebrate?

### **Laura Wilson Gentry**

Um, I would say the university as a whole approached administration less formally than it does now. So, matter of fact, I've heard one person one administrator refer to that as the days of the wild west. There wasn't a lot of really, regulation of, and I don't want to make it sound like we were doing anything illegal, but we weren't maybe as regulated as we are. Now, the students, I've seen a very definite change in. Over time, when I first came here, most of our student, most of the students I was teaching were older than I was, okay, that that reaches to the non-traditional aspect. And they tended to be more mid-level managers.

And what I've seen now in, you know, the last time I taught in the MPA program, the students were more perhaps, putting their foot on the first rung of the administrative supervisory ladder, but they weren't mid-level. And so that was a bit of a change. Because when I was teaching students who were mid-level managers, if I could say, how many of you have written a professional memo asking for this, and most of the class would raise their hands. By the time I was finished, I was incorporating more memo writing into the class assignments, because students needed that experience.

### **Elizabeth Epps**

So, when you shift to a scenario where you are consistently seeing an influx of more first timers dipping their toe into early supervision, early management, how do you address their concerns differently? And what are how are their concerns actually different from a mid-level manager, you know, we can all assume that a mid-level manager has had a certain amount of experience and they've either experienced a certain amount of success and a certain amount of failure that they then build on to and transition into what we would call later success or those sweet spot moments. For first time supervisors, are you teaching them theory and practice in equal doses? Or how are you how are you tempering what you know versus what they need to know, to be more confident from the perspective of leadership?

### **Laura Wilson Gentry**

I think when I was teaching the mid-level manager, they understood the value of statistics. They may not have liked the class, but they understood the value of it because they've been working with statistics in in their real-life job. I moved to teaching more the person who's just starting out, it was also trying to let them know what is the role of evidence in making a case may that's the best way to put the mid-level manager knew that. The first-time person really did not understand what the role of evidence would be. And to dig into that. Also working on things

like the skill set, how do you put together remember? How do you write things in a professional manner? That was something that I was really trying to work on with my students.

**Elizabeth Epps**

You were holistically looking at their, their worldview rather than just focusing in on one aspect of their leadership.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yes. And trying to give them a scope, a toolset that they could work with, not only mathematically, but also in terms of communication in something, how to do presentations in my class. One of the scarier things to ask the student to do. So, yeah, I really tried to give my students much more of a toolbox to work with.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Your research has mostly focused on poverty, policy, welfare reform and the working poor. Do you see parallels between where you were born and where you grew up? And what is or what used to be called the blue-collar town of Baltimore? And did that help you to understand the environment that you were walking into and working within? And how did that guide and direct some of your some of your scholarly work?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I think I felt very comfortable working in more of a city that was bluer collar based, as opposed to I think being in Cambridge, Massachusetts would have made me crazy. But I really felt comfortable here in Baltimore. Um, I would not say that my, what I did was my family really influenced what I worked on. I think that made for the aspect of the working poor. My father owned a gas station. And he was one of two partners in this business, he, and his brother, I would not say that they were the working poor, but I did see some of the guys who worked for them would definitely be in that group. And so, I kind of grew up being around people who were sometimes living from paycheck to paycheck.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Can you tell us a little bit about the inspiration behind your book, When Work is Not Enough? And I understand you co-authored this book. Tell us about the book, your experiences writing it, as well as the reception that it received once the public got a chance to take a look at your work?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Well, well, I was working with Bob Stoker, and one of the things that impressed us on the PPI Grant was that the federal government, in a lot of programs gave a flat amount of money to a welfare recipient. They didn't factor in the cost of living. So, if you lived in Mississippi at the time, in Mississippi, you got the same amount as someone in Maryland, but the big things we were concerned about was this lack of factoring in the cost of living and a real foundation in the book. We were doing a lot of analysis based on that. We were also looking at something that most people don't realize. The biggest welfare program in the United States is food stamps now called SNAP, not cash payment welfare.

And SNAP and programs like CHIP, actually also wrap their arms around the working poor. You can go up to a certain level a certain amount beyond the official poverty level and be eligible for some of these programs, like I said, particularly SNAP and CHIP and Medicaid. And so, we're interested in that intersection of really anti-

poverty programs that could serve the working poor, and how that manifested itself. In states with a high cost of living, I mean, Maryland is not a cheap place to live. So that really became the level of interest. It really rose out of that grant that we had worked on at the Schaefer Center. And we wrote a number of articles on welfare, compliance and then moved into when work is not enough. The reception of the book, it got pretty good reviews, my co-author and I joke that when we ever get paid by the Brookings Institute, we're going to take ourselves out for lunch. I mean, the agreement was we had to sell so many copies of the book before we began receiving royalties. And I think the last royalty statement I got from Brookings showed that we finally made the targeted sales level and we had earned \$10.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Oh, my goodness. So how many books did you sell? So, have you sold so far? Just in case someone wants to capture that nuance.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yeah. Think about five to 6000.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Okay, that's amazing. That's so when you think of things from the perspective of a specialty niche, which is your research area? That is pretty realistic for someone to be mindful of, if they're following in your footsteps and doing the same line of work, especially in this area?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yes. And this is not the area that it once was, I think, particularly the studies of food stamps, now SNAP has much more morphed into, and I'm looking for the right term. I'm looking at food, food availability, food deserts. It's really kind of shifted a little bit so that the emphasis is definitely different.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Do you find that students today are asking questions that you've asked throughout the years? Or do you see some different translations occurring on the landscape? Because we are in a different time, or we have been in the midst of a pandemic? Or because they are concerned about the shifts that we've all experienced across the nation with regard to the impact of politics and discourse?

Well, social justice and inequities. I think, I need to get back a little bit here. I don't have these days, as much interaction with students. Right after Work Is Not Enough came out, I was the DPA director, and I was asked to take on the executive directorship of the School of Public Affairs. And so, I taught maybe two classes a semester for about three years. And then when the College of Public Affairs was created, not the first Dean, Dr. Thomas, but the second Dean, Dr. Percy asked me to be their associate dean. Pretty much I've not taught a lot; I've pitched in on occasion.

I did teach last fall, some doctoral students, but most of my interactions these days have been more with the doctoral students than they are with say, undergraduates or masters' students are much more passionate about social equity issues. And I remember the last class that I taught, we had one student who was looking at, let me get this right, programs for non-English speakers in comparison across different sites with different revenues coming in. So could a wealthier community afford more interaction, then, you know, in the inner city, I've had

students looking at different aspects of drug policy. I'm sitting on a dissertation right now have a student who is looking at it says, access to health care across the board.

So, I'm seeing students more interested, I guess that's probably the best way to put it in social justice issues. But I'm, I really don't teach that much anymore. So it's hard for me to talk about, you know, the average undergraduate or even the average master's student. Can you share with me some of your memories over the years of successes or changes that you've experienced at the University of Baltimore that just stand out to you as either innovative or times when the university has maybe been resilient when things got a little tough or big decisions that were made that perhaps were controversial at one point in time that are more mainstream now? Is there anything in particular that stands out in that way for you?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I think, personally, what stood out to me the most was, in my first couple of years here, I had a student come up to me and say, oh, I can't believe it. I'm never going to make it through this statistics class. At the end of the semester, he was arguing with me to get an A- rather than an A point out to him how far he had come? Yes. And he just kind of stopped smiling. You typically it's on there, I would consider that that just stands out my mind is one of the things that I'm most proud of, in my teaching. I think one of the most controversial things that I've seen was the creation of the College of Public Affairs.

That was something that I know the faculty in the divisions that eventually became the college really wanted to have the synergy of programs that dealt with the public sector that somehow dealt with management and administration, in the public sector, just being able to come together and work across those lines. And I think we've established an identity. I know, Dean Hartley right now is very involved with having a start next gen public service group. And I think that's important, the whole recognition of the importance of really, public service, I guess, for lack of a better term. And I think that's important. I think I can't speak for how the people in the College of Arts and Sciences feel, but I think we feel that this was a very good move for us.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Is there anything that you would change? Or that you would that's always been on your wish list that you would like to leave as perhaps a task to those that inherit it in the future, pass on to someone, perhaps? A legacy assignment, for lack of a better phrase.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I'm hoping that Dean Hartley wants to do some strategic planning. And I'm hoping that that will work to either-even further the integration of themes across the three schools. I think that will be very helpful. We recognize that, yes, program evaluation is taught in SPIA. But there are also some elements in Human Services Administration, there are some elements in criminal justice, how can we work together better and may cross the boundaries a little bit more than we have.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Not being fearful of those challenges, but seeing how you can create a better, stronger institution with degrees that continue to speak to the relevance of the times that we're in.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Exactly. You phrased it very well, Elizabeth.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So, here's, here's, here's a question. You are looking to retirement. But my guess is that you're going to have a busier retirement than most and I say that with a smile.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Oh, probably. So yes.

**Elizabeth Epps**

What's on your list of to do's whether they're, whether they be academic or non-academic? Is it safe to ask that question? Or should we have interview number two for that?

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

I think, yeah, I may still be involved with a little bit of teaching through the Schaefer Center, they have some non-degree programs. And I've had up that discussion or two with Dr. Cotten about possibly teaching in the Certified Public Manager Program that that program is offered remotely. And if she calls on me, I'll definitely do that. I have told my successor, Dr. Sheehan, that he should feel free to call me on speed dial because this is, Associate Dean is a very complex job. And I kind of call it a "crisis du jour," you never know what you're walking into any given day. Right. And so that if he needs history, but other than that, um, I would like to spend a lot more time working on my weaving. I have two granddaughters that I feel I haven't I would like to spend more time with while they're still at an age where they're willing to hang out with grandma. And I'm about my family has always adopted a very unusual kind of dog called a Schipperke.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Oh, yes.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Oh, you actually know what they are?

**Elizabeth Epps**

I'm a dog fanatic. I always tease people I say I'm a native dog speaker, but that I also speak fluent cat because in my family we've had both, but I actually drool every time I pass a dog when I'm coming between like the parking garage and the office because oftentimes residents in the area or out taking their lovely little ones for a walk and I just stop and stare and just stroll and say hello and try to get a rub.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Well, we just lost our senior dog this past August. I mean she lived until 15. That's a that's a great age She was the grande dame of the house. Builders all but I'm about to adopt another one. Okay, you know, we've had our time to mourn, and we have a Schipperke mix and you can tell she's missing big sister. We are about to adopt a retired show dog who's not fertile anymore. My husband would prefer that we get the dogs from shelters, but this little lady is in a kennel. The kennel had is very ethical, they've searching for a good home for her for months. So, we decided we are going to take on Miss Daphne at the end of January.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Fantastic.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Getting two dogs used to each other I think is going to take some work.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Yes, yes, but you sound like a lady who has never turned down On a good challenge, and I believe that Miss Daphne will be in good hands.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Miss Daphne, I'm more worried about the one that I've currently got at home, she's active. So, it's going to be quite an introduction, quite an experience. But particularly, I want to get back to working on my wounds. I've had some physical challenges that I finally have had corrected. But that kept me from leaving for the last couple of years.

**Elizabeth Epps**

So now you get to get some more handwork done.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Yes, exactly.

**Elizabeth Epps**

Fantastic. We're coming to the end of our interview time, is there anything that you would like to leave our listeners with that we haven't covered specifically, but that you would like to say? I think what I'd like to say is that UB is a very good place with a lot of people with vision and passion. I like the fact here at UB, I can call people. My husband works at College Park. And he almost has to pull up the phone directory if it's outside of his unit here, I can call over to administration and finance. He couldn't do that. So, I like, maybe the term intimacy isn't right, But I do like the fact that this is a group of people that know each other, that we can build relationships, that's probably the best way to do it. I hope that continues.

It's been a stressful few years. And I would hate to see that that be lost. Yeah. I think you've captured it well. I believe that we are a very passionate bunch, like you said, we do hold on to our vision. We celebrate our friendships. We welcome new folks, because we're always happy to have someone new, get onto our teams and just celebrate who we are and learn about what makes us do the things that we do very well. And then before you know it, they're pulling other folks in too. So, it's been a joy. Talking to you today, I hope that I've given you some positive thoughts about the life that you've lived with us. And perhaps later today, when you're sitting back relaxing, and you've recovered from this interview that you can smile about all of your wonderful accomplishments and everything that you've shared today.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Well thank you and it's been the road that I've been on, I don't see anything, all that exceptional about it, but it's been my life. So I do care very deeply about, you know, the university, especially the people in the College of Public Affairs, I mean, this has been my home for 32 years.

**Elizabeth Epps**

I think that you have earned the title of Trailblazer. You can wear that button proudly alongside your UB button.

**Laura Wilson Gentry**

Okay. I will take that.

**Elizabeth Epps**

thank you very much for joining us today. I hope all of our listeners have been encouraged by this interview. And we are now concluding it's 3:09 In the afternoon, December 8, 2022. Thanks so much for joining us have a