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Jackie L. Newman Memoir

Newman, Jackie L.

Interview and memoir
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UIS Alumni Sage Society

Newman, is currently the Executive Director of the Springfield Housing Authority and is working on a doctorate in Public Administration at UIS. She graduated from Sangamon State University in 1991 with an undergraduate degree and started working on a master's degree in Public Administration, obtaining the master's from the University of Illinois Springfield in 1995. Newman remembers classes with professors Tim Miller and Randy Kucera.

Interview by Janice Spears, 2010
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Narrator: Jackie L. Newman
Date: April 13, 2010
Place: Springfield, IL
Interviewer: Janice Spears

Q. I want to start again, Jackie. Janice Spears with... Ok, I'll try this, Janice Spears, 2010, with Jackie L. Newman. Ok, Jackie, prior to attending Sangamon State University, what if any was the extent of your post-secondary education?

A. I attended Robert Morris College, which was basically a business college at the time primarily and received an associate degree in legal secretarial science because that's kind of what I thought I wanted to do at the time.

Q. And what years did you attend SSU?

A. I attended Sangamon State University 1987 through 1991 I think for my bachelors.

Q. And then your masters?

A. Then I went on for my masters and then I received my masters from UIS, it was then UIS, in... wow (laughter), you would think I would know these dates right off hand. I received my masters in around 1995.

Q. And what was your degree in?

A. I'm sorry, my master's was in Public Administration.

Q. Ok. Describe in detail your initial impressions of Sangamon State University and your classes in the early days.

A. Well, what I liked about Sangamon State, well many things. One, as a working professional you could get quality education locally. The other thing that I really enjoyed about it is because it was very practical, things that you could really take from the classroom back to the work force. And then the small class sizes were great for me, which is why I chose a junior college when I first started in my educational career.

Q. Were you going to school part time, evenings, and working?

A. That has been my career... educational career, part time, evenings, and of course those wonderful weekend classes.

Q. Did your impressions of the campus and the classes, the class size, did any of those impressions change in the course of your studies? And if so, how?

A. Not really. I mean think that they shaped the curriculum in a deeper way for lack of a better phrase as it progressed. I mean my master's was of course more intense than my bachelor's and of course my doctorate is more intense than the master's. But I think just allowing students to help shape curriculum and provide feedback is critical and it appears as if they are listening to the feedback from the students.

Q. And you mentioned a PhD; you are currently working on a PhD at UIS?

A. I'm currently working on my doctorate in public administration at UIS and I just got finished with the comps just less than thirty days ago and preparing for orals as we speak and hopefully we'll be able to move toward dissertation topics.

Q. Ok, let's go back to the early days a bit. And I would like you to identify and describe two or three of the most memorable professors that you had good or bad.

A. Well, in my management program, Tim Miller comes to mind. He was in my undergraduate program, and he was always very accessible and he was always very helpful. Just not only in the classroom but professionally. He... I would always call him or talk to him about things that I would run into in the business world. And he was always very helpful in either directing me to resources or based on his experience, helping a young professional just kind of walk through processes. So Tim Miller is who I recall most in my bachelor's program.

And in my master's program, I would have to say it was Professor Kucera. I had him during Capstone and I also had him for an additional class. And he was just always stretching us to do our best. I think each professor does that, but I think he pulled out in me things in my writing style that I didn't realize I had in me. So those would be the two that really stick out to me for both the programs.

Q. What's your impression of the doctoral program so far?

A. I... because we are the first cohort, it's been very interesting. I think you know I appreciate the fact that we are shaping history by being the cohort. There are some things that I certainly would like to recommend that are a little bit different in the upcoming. Nothing really substantial but just maybe the order that the classes are given I think might be considered.

There's some that I think should come before the others now that it makes more sense now that hindsight is twenty/twenty of course, but I think the doctoral program is very useful. It's been helpful for me in my current role. Everything that I've done in terms of papers have been for the Housing Authority, either dealing with homelessness, trying to develop a day center, just the classes that I've had have helped me to think through some of the social challenges that we are dealing with the clients that we serve.

Q. How long have you been with Springfield Housing Authority and tell us a little bit about your positions.

A. Ok, I've been with Housing Authority twenty-five years this year, started as a receptionist and worked that for a very short period of time. I was promoted to the Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director. So I served three Executive Directors before I was promoted to Human Resource Manager. And I did that for about four or five years and was promoted to director of Section 8 and then was self sufficiency where we act as the contract administrator between landlords and our constituents.

And then I was promoted to Deputy Director and I served in that capacity for about three or four years. And what I did with Deputy Director was over... act as the right arm to the Executive Director overseeing modernization, construction, maintenance, finance, all of those areas. And then just within the last five years, serving as the Executive Director casting the vision, making sure stuff happens.

Q. How many employees do you have and what is the size of your budget?

A. We have... we average 65 employees. We have about a twenty million dollar budget. And that includes our capital fund budget, our operating budget, and our Section 8 voucher program budget.

Q. That's a lot. In the early years that you were at SSU, they had University Week. Do you remember that? It was a special feature in the curriculum. Did you enroll in any of the University Weeks? But of course that might be before your time.

A. I don't recall University Week.

Q. That might be the 1970s.

A. Yeah, I don't recall University Week.

Q. Did you have a favorite classroom on campus or downtown or anyplace?

A. All of my classes have been out on the main campus, and I like the PAC building only, most of my classes within the Public Administration field have been in the PAC building only because they just felt so connected. My management classes were in some of the smaller buildings. And I just felt a little bit detached from the university; that it's just something about being in the circle, in the PAC building that just drives it home.

Q. Have you stayed in touch with any of the students, staff, or professors that you knew when you started at SSU?

A. I would have to... it's Tim Miller, I just recently spoke with him.

Q. Is he still there?

A. He's still there. He's in the political science area now. But I just recently spoke with him and then I spoke with Professor Kucera a couple of years ago. I run into him periodically, usually downtown as we're walking or I usually run into him at the grocery store. We shop at the same place.

Q. Oh, he must be proud of you. Were there any campus practices, for example pass/fail grading, casual attire, unstructured class discussion, unusual course topics that impressed you strongly, anything out of the ordinary that was unique to UIS?

A. Not really, not that I can think of offhand.

Q. Did you and other students have a favorite off-campus meeting place?

A. Well of late, our favorite meeting place was Panera Bread. We'd go there... Panera. We'd go to Panera and we'd meet and we'd you know a lot of the doctoral students and just kind of process things. On site though, we'd like to meet up by the coffee place on second floor PAC.

Q. In recent years, do you visit the campus for purposes other than classes? Do you attend any university events or serve on any committees.

A. I do serve on the CAB Committee and that's a recent appointment, so I'm just learning the logistics of it. But we, I mean I take my children there to see, to Sangamon State Auditorium all the time to see the various events that come in. We go to the orchestra thing every Christmas and so it's wonderful. We go for other reasons.

Q. In retrospect, what was the value of the education you received?

A. I am the type of person that thinks that you should never stop learning. And I think the value of the education is that it one, enhances your critical thinking. But the other part is, what has been very beneficial for me is every time I have finished a degree at UIS, I was promoted. And I wasn't, I didn't ask for the promotion. They sought me out to promote me.

And I think there is something to be said just about pursuing higher learning that I think your employer's value, the fact that you are investing in yourself because most of it was paid for, 99% of it has been paid by me and the Housing Authority has provided some, but primarily it's been a self investment. And so I think in retrospect every opportunity to learn has opened a door for me in my professional career.

Q. And I really hope that when you are finished with all of that busy work, writing that dissertation, that you will be involved in the Alumni Association. And there are so many opportunities to involve yourself in giving back to the university.

A. Yeah.

Q. And it is such a joy to do that.

A. It is, and I plan to, I plan to. I am... I sing professionally gospel, so March through November is our busy time. I'm also a pastor's wife. We planted a church five years ago. And so if you've ever been involved in a church plant or a new church, you can only imagine how busy that is. So we started from nothing; we don't have any religious group that is supporting us. But my husband had a vision and he felt that is what God had told him to do.

So once my life settles down a little bit that I do... one of the reasons I accepted being in the CAB, on the CAB committee was the fact that I do want to start giving back there. But it's just kind of balancing motherhood, singing, pastor's wife, sorority involvements, and some of the... homeless task force, and all those other things that I involve myself with to be able to do that as well without compromising because my values are God, family, and then everything else. And so I try to just keep that balance in my life as I go.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add for the Archives?

A. No, just that Sangamon State University/University of Illinois at Springfield, is a wonderful place for quality education. And I think that if you are a serious student, and I just... I guess I appreciate the fact that it's a four year university now. And even if you are a serious professional who wants to get a quality education but cannot quit your job to go full time away, I think you get a quality education right here in Springfield, Illinois at UIS.

Q. Thank you, Jackie.

A. You're welcome.

14 minutes 2 seconds

End of Interview