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**WOMEN AT THE CENTER:  
HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STUDIES  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

**TAPE LOG**

Monika Shafi is the Elias Ahuja Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature. She has served as chairperson for the Department of Women and Gender Studies from 2005-2012 and from 2001 to the present.

Name of person(s) interviewed: Monika Shafi

Other people present: No one else present

Interviewer: Marie Laberge

Date of interview: May 10, 2013

Location of interview: In Monika Shafi's office at Women and Gender Studies building, 34 West Delaware Ave, Newark

Special conditions (noise, interruptions, etc.): Background noises often during interview, motorcycle, laughter and mowing noises in background.

General description of contents: Brief discussion of growing up in Germany, early education and college. Move to United States, dissertation work. Arrival at University of Delaware, work in Foreign Languages and Literature department. Work with Women's Studies, how she came to be Director of Program. Discussion of the many changes in the Program over the years she has been chair, move to new building, Concentration in Sexualities and Gender Studies, new hires, Departmental status, concentration in Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Concentration, Name change.

Recording Format and disc number: Video interview

Total Running Time: 31:09 minutes

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**TOPIC SUMMARY**

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00:00    Born in Germany, discussion of childhood and not being aware of gender issues. Encouraged by father to be a lawyer. Avid reader, curious. Eager to learn English. Awareness of gender came later. Started working in German literature, had no women professors even though 80% students were women. Interested in working on gender issues in research, but there was no feminist literary criticism in German universities at that time.

3:07    Discussion about arrival in Delaware. Husband is from Pakistan, theoretical physicist, travel a lot. Spent time in Geneva at CERN. Wanted to come to US. She started PhD at University of Maryland, met woman professor who became her advisor and encountered feminist literary criticism. Loved it. Qaiser got position at UD, she was still working on dissertation and then position opened up in Foreign Languages and

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Literature in 1986, hired on tenure track position for German literatures. Comments by Dean Helen Gouldner about her 3/3 teaching load.

5:06     Wrote dissertation on German women writers, research focus on gender, taught first course on German women writers. Discussion about impact of women's studies on German literature and development of feminist literary criticism in the field. (sirens outside) Organization founded in 1970s Women in German, first group of scholars trying to create network of women who want to do research in gender issues, became wildly successful. Important multigenerational network, serves on editorial board for journal.

7:15     Discussion about backlash, were challenging assumptions about the field and methodologies but didn't encounter much of it. Came to it after tough battles had been fought.

8:00     Would attend some of the WOMS talks and taught some of the cross-listed courses. But wasn't aware of all the early work in women's studies.

9:00     Discussion of her arrival as Interim Director of Women's Studies in 2005, then Director. Received an email from Gretchen Bauer, Associate Dean asking if she would consider serving as Interim Director, saying you would have to do 4 or 5 things, seemed very doable. Came totally out of the blue. Accepted. Had met Jessica [Schiffman] and other people in program. WOMS was at a point when goals were clear. Terrific teaching and research, just needed to be recognized. Fun to work towards departmental status.

11:39   Changes since she became chair – Move to new building, move from Ewing. A lot of support within unit and administration, particularly Gretchen Bauer. Has written book on houses and material objects, saw a good bond between the house we moved into and the program. Was one of the original buildings Women's Studies was it. Discussion of the spaces in Smith Hall. Now in a good location.

13:47   Discussion about the minor in Sexualities and Gender Studies. Was a minor in search of a home and seemed like a strong thematic and administrative home for it. Name change wasn't a radical move, from women's feminist focus to larger complex, looking at gender across the board. There is a lot of potential for the minor.

15:09   Discussion about added faculty lines. Very important goal to be able to get a tenure track line designated for Women's Studies. Took some negotiations. College has been very supportive of Women's Studies, position was recognition of the work we do. Have asked for more lines and optimistic we will get it. Pascha Bueno-Hansen hired. Have created courses about global context, also a lot of interdisciplinary research work being done. (Laughter in background)

17:15   Discussion of transition to department. Process started over 15 years ago, predecessors have worked for it for a long time. APR review clearly stated we should be a department. Change in administrative leadership helped the goal. Actual process in moving it forward was very smooth. Impact of departmental status, very important. Difference in status. Have certain expectations, in terms of teaching, research, focus on growth. It is recognition of the tremendous work done by the faculty over many years.

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Gives us status we deserve. Significance of the numbers students we teach. Small but we achieve a lot. Has to do with the way WOMS developed, creates a different buy-in, different level of connection.

21:12 Discussion of change of name – not much of a discussion, it recognizes where the field is and what we are doing. Acknowledges what has already happened and is much more inclusive.

21:49 Discussion of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Concentration and why its important. Discussion of DV and how prevalent it is. Program allows us to teach and educate students about DV but it also has a practical aspect because it trains them to be advocates for survivors. Important to have services component that allows students to gain experiences in the community. Potential growth area for WOMS, relates to 2014 conference on 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VAWA, honoring Vice President Joe Biden's work. (Mowing sounds in background)

24:06 Discussion of work and where Women and Gender Studies is going in the future. Domestic Violence work has a lot of potential and hope to grow the program. Research on the changing nature of work and how gender comes into play. Hard to predict whole field. Asking about how our work makes a difference in students lives, teaching awareness of issues people have not been aware of before.

26:48 What still needs to be addressed? Within department, would like to see opportunity to grow the faculty and hire more tenure track positions. Growing the DV program and SGST.

27:48 Most significant contribution of WOMS to university is the awareness of gender, and how we have to look at peoples identity configuration to understand how it impacts all areas of study. The work of WOMS is to talk about issues and being awareness to how we operate and construct society.

29:28 Looking at historical record, it has been an success story. Has been an honor to chair the department. Have learned so much. Grown as a person and learned from everyone been interacting with. Been a great pride and honor. It's really a group effort, model of how to become successful in nonhierarchical ways.

31:06 End of interview