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Mae Carter

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: This is an interview with Mae Carter chairperson of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Mae, we're talking now at the John M. Clayton Hall Continuing Education Building. In your position, ah, your major concern I would imagine is to keep aware of changes and ah, needs in terms of the status of women in the University of Delaware.

Ms. Carter: The commission on the status of women access and advocate for women at the university. It also, um, our charge also includes, increasing the awareness of the emerging roles of men and women today. We think that men have as much to gain as women from the women's movement as they need to be freed from stereotypes also. We do this through a number of ways. However, um we are dealing with a very difficult area, that of changing attitudes and changing behavior.

Interviewer: Where do you think things are going now temperature wise and the climate? We have been hearing now about the women movement since the Betty Friedan book ten years ago, ah, The Feminine Mystique.

Ms. Carter: I would say that compared to ten years ago, there been a lot of changes on the campus. I started work approximately 8 years ago in the division of continuing education under a title One Grand, working on educational services for women. At that time, we had some women coming in for counseling and academic advisement and we had one course, a short course called Great Expectations. Adele Robinson initiated the grant that started this area and Mariel Boyle was the first counselor who worked in it. I was the second one.

We now have evidence so far, in that lot of the services that were originally provided for women under the title One Grand, were recognized as being important for our people including men. And so as a result, our access centre has developed in the division of continuing education, where man and women are both having this kind of counseling and academic advisement.

We have a number of courses now especially for women and they are designed to meet the needs of women where they are today. We have lengthened the original grade expectation course, changed its name and have a lot more of individual growth within the course. It is no longer just lecture substitute material, we now have um, in addition to the

substitute material which we present, we now have discussion groups and self exploration exercises and um at the last session we provide a decision making model and we are encouraging women to make a decision after examining all their options about what they want to do with the rest of their lives. In other words, some women may not change their life style at all, but at least they made a decision to do what they are doing rather than just floating along without any direction.

We also offer career exploration um and a course designed for women who wish to return to the world of work. We talk about careers in the wide sense -um, whether you want to do it as a volunteer or whether you want to do it in paid employment. We talk about how volunteerism can work for the individual. We talk about identifying your own needs and values in relation to a career and once you have identified the general area, then we relate it to the job market. Following that, we help women write a resume and also we do some coaching for ah, an employment interview.

[00:05:28]

Interviewer: Is this within the access centre or part of the original course and has it expanded?

Ms. Carter: This is ah, not within the access centre. I am now talking about individual non-credit courses. This now follows sixty gap set. It is a separate course called career exploration. We are also... in the past we have had courses about women and law, women and investments, however, they were not from the feminist perspective. Because at that time there really wasn't much of a feminist perspective when it came to law because law was not on books. We are planning a new course, Women and the Law which will be more on the feminist perspective.

Another area that we have done a lot of work in continuing education in is assertiveness training. And we have a number of courses going there. We have ah, a lot of flexibility in that we are really able to respond to the needs of women as they are identified.

You asked about ah... now, what I'm talking about here are women in the community, adult women not as much as university. I will say that in the past ten years, we've never been able to repeat a course... eight years we've never been able to repeat the same course. Mainly because the level of women awareness of the women who enroll in the course is so changed each time that we must adapt it to where they are and they have, they've become much more aware than they were.

Interviewer: That says a lot, if it could change from semester to semester?

Ms. Carter: Oh yes, it really does. Now concerning undergraduate or student awareness, Delaware is conservative and I think that the women's studies academic area has done a lot to increase student awareness. The very first course we had which ah, Dr. Florence Geis' psychology department coordinated had over one hundred students in it.

We now have a number of women studies courses that are cross-listed with regular departments and the enrollments are quite high ah, 40... 25, 40, 50, 60 in each course. There are also men in these courses, it's not just women. The women studies dormitory Warner Hall, has um helped to increase the awareness. They um...

Interviewer: I think I should point out here that the Warner Hall has traditionally been a fine women's dormitory um when it was part of the earlier women's college and when senior women were the only people allowed to live there.

Ms. Carter: They have quite a program in which they, students must make a contract to do some project in... with women's studies as part of living there now. Um, I think a very great highlight was when we were able to have a faculty position of coordinator women's studies funded approximately um, two and a half years ago and it was, was it three and a half? About three and a half years ago and we were able to hire our first women's studies coordinator.

Unfortunately Ellen Morgan, who was our first coordinator was not able to stay and resigned so that we needed to have another search. And at that time Joyce Walstad was hired. And she is still currently women's studies coordinator. Um, the...

Interviewer: What about ah, increased employment opportunities? Not, not in terms of how many but, women are do you find better accepted in Delaware positions now? Is the awareness, would you feel in the state itself and to the total population?

[00:10:11]

Ms. Carter: I think there's been some change, but I think that off course is because of the, the federal government's action. I would suspect that was taken... that was rescinded that not many women would really maintain their

employment at the level where they want to be. I guess you are aware that what women do is seen as less good even though it is not.

Interviewer: How do you... ah, do you base this on what has come out of the women's studies program or...

Ms. Carter: And some research.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ms. Carter: What women's studies has done is to really help the disciplines enlarge. In other words, in history, the history of women has not been written very well or very much. It's beginning to be. Ah and also not only is it new areas but it's new perspective on areas that have already been looked at. An example would be motivation in psychology, where Martina Horner has shown that most of the motivation research related to males and that women do not, are not motivated the same way. And a lot of hard academic work needs to be done, both in new areas and in correcting and getting women back to where they should be.

Interviewer: Was this part of that study the one showed that the level of math interest and excellence was not the same for women after their own grades? That men went on... I think that was done University of Illinois, maybe?

Ms. Carter: Well that's a fairly recently one as I recall. The research I'm talking about is ah, five years, but that also shows socialization what it does. Um, but what I'm talking about is the, the actual research has been limited by not including women.

At the University of Delaware we had a very strong affirmative action coordinator in Janet Sam who really did help recruit a number of women in positions here at the university. I think one of the problems that we're looking at now is, do we have a revolving "door"? In other words, each year a number of women are recruited but the number... the total number does not seem to increase. Our question would be, are they on one year contracts? Is the climate so unpleasant that women are driven out of the job here? Um, it, it may be that they might not have had the proper credentials in the first place but, um, I think that is very doubtful.

Interviewer: You are saying that the original problem which existed when an all male Biology department for example would exist alongside an English department that had only two women before affirmative action, the attitudes then, I guess you're saying prevail, still prevail?

Ms. Carter: Well, I think there has been a lot of growth. But I do think we have to recognize that we have all been socialized over a long period of time and to change these attitudes is a very, very difficult thing. A lot of us don't even know that we have them. Of course the other thing is as jobs get harder and harder to get, it's going to be more and more difficult because some people still see women as "not needing a job." And a lot of people can understand the women's movement in the... the limitations that women have had in the past conceptually, but what it really comes down to their own job or to promotion and tenure or to a salary increase people feel very differently. They're not quite as generous.

[00:15:15]

Interviewer: This is [Inaudible 00:15:16] probably as large a problem in the total population as the emergence of the black persons' employment opportunity.

Ms. Carter: Well that is correct, except sexual discrimination is still socially acceptable. You will never say, no one would ever say "I'm a racist" any more, it is not acceptable. But men will still say, "I'm a male chauvinist pig" and laughs and everyone else laughs.

An interesting change of behavior that I've noticed in some of the forces or not that I've noticed as much as women have reported to me, is in the courses where they look at themselves and make a decision, just by going through that course they have decided that their particularly teenage sons will no longer treat them the way they have been treated in the past. That they must do their share including washing the dishes doing the shopping and that if a girl wants to mow the lawn, she can mow the lawn and the boy can do other things.

In other words, not only have they seen some of the things that have been going on with new eyes, they are doing something about it. And actually both boys and girls are being freed from stereotypical behavior. And the attitude towards the mother who now is recognizing that she is a person and has certain, and has a right to her own feelings and her own thoughts and the fact that they should be respected, is making a difference in the family structure.

Interviewer: What about women's attitude towards divorce, premarital sex, sex in the form of the boy-girl relationships in collage, what you may know about that. Is it true it's much freer?

Ms. Carter: Well, when we talk about divorce, we've had several courses for single women and one for divorced people. And what I'm finding is that women no longer view divorce as a tragedy. In fact many women welcome it. I have the experience of counseling a number of women who have been recently divorced and seeing them several months, a year, a year and a half later, even two or three years later and they are new people. In other words they have been freed by the divorce rather than being sad or down trodden. Of course the real problem is the financial problem for those women.

Most of them had done exactly what society had told them to do. They married, they had children, they supported their husbands. When I say support I mean run the house well, took care of all the problems so that he could advance in his job. And quite often he would find someone else. And there was this woman who had done everything she was supposed to and done, left with nothing, sometimes not even insurance money. And she may be in her fifties. It's a very difficult situation to find yourself in. And you got younger women who are married and have families are looking at this very carefully. And a lot of them are saying, you know I don't have many problems now but I want to be able to take care of myself. And as a result, they're coming back to school and getting degrees, they're looking for work and it is a valid concern. It is....

Interviewer: There was a recent article, I wish I could remember where titled, "The Divorcee, The New Poor. And it bears what you're saying. I'm simply mentioning it in terms to this time in our economic life in this country.

[00:20:04]

Ms. Carter: Well actually divorce does not benefit women, because that assumes that the job market is open to women and that they have been trained for a job. And of course the job market is not open to women like it is now open to men. It's very interesting. Men see women as getting advantages, what they are not doing is recognizing the fact that they have had all the advantages in the past and this is just bringing up minorities. And I consider women a conceptual minority.

Interviewer: It's a very good phrase.

Ms. Carter: Up to their level.

Interviewer: It's interesting you bring up the words supportive for the woman who has been supportive all those years and suddenly finds herself not needing to support or be, or finding that she is not support. We haven't talked about

the role of women as parents, mothers and the family unit as it has always been and changes in that destroy the family unit. Do you find many changes among young women about the family unit itself?

Ms. Carter: When you say about family unit...

Interviewer: I meant in terms of protecting the family and thinking of the nuclear family as they had been conditioned too. Are they changing somewhere? Because if the nuclear family is changing...

Ms. Carter: Well, I think it's a lot more open. I think young women today expect, yeah men today to share in the responsibilities as well as the pleasures and joys of a nuclear family. In other words, men, women no longer expect men to come home from work, read the paper, have dinner served to them and go watch the ball game while the woman does all the work around the house. Takes care of the children, all the cooking, all the cleaning.

And in fact many women are working today and they feel that they make a contribution to the family. And they also feel that it's not just their family, it is their husband's family also and it is his house also and he has some responsibilities there. I think that women are beginning to recognize the need to know more about financial affairs for their family. They are beginning to recognize that they do work and they do worthwhile things and they get no recognition for it in the line of money, which is where society rewards for what it considers worthwhile. And I think that with his increased awareness of women and also the fact that she does have some control over her own body now through better methods of birth control and family planning, that she, she is freer. And she really is almost free to decide whether she will have any children or not. And of course this is very frightening to men.

Interviewer: How has this been brought out? Lots of different kinds of research have shown this? Well, is it just protecting the power in the man's world that they have always enjoyed in the business, career area or is it their own sexual vitality that they were concerned about?

Ms. Carter: No, I think they are concerned about having something of theirs be around after they're gone.

Interviewer: Are men more concerned with their mortality coming in to the next generation than women?

Ms. Carter: Well what I am saying now, I cannot give you hard actual data.

[00:25:02]

Interviewer: That's very interesting.

Ms. Carter: But men cannot have children by themselves. Men need women to have their children. And I think this is one reason why so many men are opposed to abortion. I think they are very frightened that they will not have any children.

Interviewer: I thought that this was largely the women's movement stands. The anti-abortion, my body, I am in charge of it. I thought a rather, the abortion approach.

Ms. Carter: No, probably...

Interviewer: Oh, but have men formed any abortion groups outside the Catholic Church?

Ms. Carter: Well, I've asked a number of men about it, how they feel and most of them are against abortion and I feel that one reason is, that they cannot...

Interviewer: They are threatened by this?

Ms. Carter: Well, because they cannot have any children without women. And if the women are given control, complete control over their bodies, they may not have any children when that's what they want more than anything else. That doesn't mean that they want to take care of them and it doesn't I mean or spend the time with them as a father in the true sense of the word. I think it's very interesting that low income men are very much opposed to birth control, family planning and abortions, because if they can't be successful any other way, they can be successful in producing a child. And as a result, if that is taken away from them, they may not be successful at anything.

Interviewer: I think that there has been some research done on illegitimate births among the very impoverished groups in Baltimore, which show what you are talking about. Young men would say to the girl, you know, do this for me, have this child for me. Not meaning that he and she would share responsibility.

Ms. Carter: Yeah.

Interviewer: In a way what you're saying is rather pessimistic and yet the real message is one of very positive results and continuing change.

Ms. Carter: Well, I look at it as continuing growth. Men really have as much more to gain as the women from the women's movement. Actually if looking at it in the long sense, it should be not called the women's movement, it should be called, the people's movement. And what we're talking about is that each person should be able to develop to his or her own potential in the way he or she wants. [Inaudible 00:28:16] turn it off.

I think young people today and not all of them because a lot of them have been socialized just as we older people have been, but young people today recognize that a healthy relationship is a mutual relationship. It isn't just one of domination of the other.

Another factor that I think is positive is that many young men no longer go directly from their mother's house to their wives house where they are completely taken care of. Many of them now move out of their parents home into an apartment and they're really finding out it's kind of fun to cook. They know that it's work to be done and the laundry, the cooking, the shopping that's just what you do and life. It's not an end in itself it's a means to other things. And they're used to doing that and so as they marry, they just keep right on doing it and they know how to do it. And I think that a stronger, healthier family, and family relationship will develop ah.

I really feel very hopeful for the future. I feel positive as a person who has returned to work after not working for over twenty years. I find that my husband and I have a much stronger positive relationship than when I was not working.

[00:30:08]

Interviewer: One thing probably is important here, that the women's work so called does not take very long. A woman must have something else to do because she has many appliances and she could quickly shop, she could buy fast foods if she wants to today. She doesn't have to spend her their time making that home when we used to call her a home maker after her children were all in school.

Ms. Carter: Well, here's another factor. Parkinson's Law applies to house work as well as anything else. And that is, house work expands to fill the time available for it. In a house you absolutely never can have everything done.

Interviewer: I meant, when you were talking about the laundry and the shopping and the cooking, those things can be done rather expeditiously today.

Ms. Carter: Correct, yes that's correct. Yes if you look at it 20, 30 years ago, there's no comparison. I mean, it can be done and...

Interviewer: The frozen entree can be put in into the toaster oven and out.

Ms. Carter: Well, not only that. When both people are working you can also go out to dinner.

Interviewer: Ah, we had been talking about that young man, he's not ready to go out yet and pick up the tab even if his young wife is working.

Ms. Carter: Well, I think that when we talk about the young people that they are much more open today. They do recognize that each member of the team is a full member. And some of ... and I think one reason divorce has increased so much is that many people are not willing to accept a relationship with their husband or wife that people had to accept in the past.

Interviewer: What kind of new programs are you thinking about? What about affirmative action here and now? Is it a constant effort?

Ms. Carter: Oh yes, I think affirmative action always is a constant effort. It is never completed, it's ongoing. One of the areas that the commission, well the present commission has three areas it's working in. One is professional development for employees at the university, another one is increased awareness. That is awareness of sex discrimination all over the university, in the class room, in employment. The third area is salary equalization.

Interviewer: I think that is something that you need to talk about on this tape. It's very important.

Ms. Carter: I analyze, but well, salary... the commission has access to some of the data it's being analyzed right now and it will be on our report which we are working on. I really... the data that I am most familiar with is not current. So I would like to talk later on about that.

Interviewer: Is this a major goal of your commission, salary equalization?

Ms. Carter: Of course it is a major goal. And that's one of the most important things. It's been harder to get the data this year which indicates to me that there may be more of a problem.

Interviewer: Do you think there needs to be sunshine law in terms of the departments and professor of salaries her at the university?

Ms. Carter: I think that ah... I really can't comment on that. There're a lot of factors that go to it. And there're always individual exceptions. What the commission is interested in is the broad overall view. We really cannot and we should not know individual salaries.

Another area of concern to the commission is sexual harassment at the university. We talk about sexual harassment, we're talking about someone in a power position who is using that to extract sexual favors from someone in a lower position. This could refer to faculty-student, employer-employee, it could also be the senior professor who's going to pass on the profession and tenure junior professor. It can be very broad.

Statistics are very difficult to come by on this. A lot of times it's just one person's word against another person's word. And of course it's like rape used to be. When someone reports a case, they were thought of as being a loose woman or had you know initiated the advances or something like that.

I think we also do suggest that sexual harassment is broader than enforced sexual relations. We consider it as glaring and ogling in different parts of the body after the person has made it clear that's not what they want. Even propositioning students for grades, to many students that is a very distressing experience.

[00:36:31]

Interviewer: Has this happened on this campus?

Ms. Carter: I'm sure it has happened. It happens every place. I think the thing is, this has been going on. We're not talking about new behavior patterns, what we're talking about is that women are now planning to do something about it, and will no longer accept it.

Interviewer: Did your commission bring this problem to president Teravolt or had he heard it from another source?

Ms. Carter:

Well, early last spring the commission through its news letter The Reporter had a tear off where you could write back. We asked for people to talk about cases of sexual discrimination and we promised in confidentiality . And we did receive some back. We heard about a lot more, but a lot of women are very threatened, afraid to put it in writing because a lot of times it cannot be documented. But we did get back some cases and we printed a broad summary changing the stories, but essentially the same so the individual would be protected.

And we have been meeting with the president and what developed out of our discussions was a workshop to come up with a procedure to handle sexual harassment at the university. The procedure is still on the draft stage. However we do think that we have a mechanism that may be successful and if that is true it will be a breakthrough because very... I don't know of many places that have really been able to handle sexual harassment without penalizing the woman.

Another project of the commission that we are at least planning now, is the second set of hearings on the title nine legislation. Where title nine refers to there shall be no different sex discrimination in higher education. And what we're interested in is the self evaluation study at each area the university has had to make under title nine and some of the changes that they have already made and some additional ones that they plan in the future.

One of our purposes here is to publicize and make known the positive things they have done and have on record other plans that they plan to do, in compliance with the title nine. Off course this requires a great deal of corporation with the affirmative action office to schedule, you know, to also state the part of the title nine legislation as specifically refers to different departments.

Our earlier ones, was when we... our earlier title nine hearings, approximately two years ago related to the implications that the proposed title nine guidelines would have for university in the different areas and so this would be a follow up later on to see what really happens.

[00:40:35]

Interviewer:

Do you have [inaudible 00:40:36] communications with other university units women studies groups?

Ms. Carter: Oh, oh yes, yes. I think that's one really big advantage at the University of Delaware. Most of the people working in the women's area work very closely together. We all know each other and I consider that a very big plus. Another philosophy that I guess women at the university have kind of developed about working in this area is that we have decided that confrontation did not change behavior. And as a result, we have tried to keep steady pressure as a way to accomplishing our objectives rather than big confrontations. Because often with that confrontation, a person loses face when they make a change and so as a result there aren't going to make any change unless they absolutely have to.

So the strategy of the commission is to work quietly behind the scenes. But that doesn't mean that we don't take a strong stand in private, but it does mean that we try to keep it that way. And many people say, what does a commission do? Well we do a lot of things, but I guess because of the way we work we don't get a lot of credit for some of the things we do. We often work as a catalyst to affect change.

Interviewer: Very intelligent way of doing it.

Ms. Carter: Well, so far we have made some ... we feel that our work has been worthwhile. We know that a lot more needs to be done. I think one of the major handicaps is as it was in women studies when we first started that, we all do this in addition to our regular jobs and sometimes it is almost at a personal risk, so...

Interviewer: This is important to talk about. The personal risk in terms of employment at the university, would it go that far?

Ms. Carter: Well, in women studies, many faculty women have been told to get out of women studies and to get on with their research in their own disciplines or they wouldn't be here. One of the big problems is that...

Interviewer: This is horrendous, am sorry I feel that this is horrendous.

Ms. Carter: Well, I know that it is true. Well, even for me I really must do my regular job and all that the commission does...

[00:43:47] End of Audio