

Monmouth Memories

Monmouth Memories Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Mary Brennan

Interviewer/Transcriber: Allison Camardo, Monmouth University Student

Mary Brennan has been a faculty member in the School of Education at Monmouth University since 2004. She was born in downtown Manhattan and raised in the Bronx in New York. She attended Lehman College, also in New York. Her major was special education with a focus on the blind and visually impaired. She chose to focus on the blind and visually impaired for three reasons. One was that her brother had worked with blind children, so she was familiar with it. The second was that it is a different type group of people to work with and therefore it is very rewarding. The final reason is that a family friend had lost his sight and so it brought in a personal tie.

After college she was trained as a teacher for the blind and visually impaired and worked in that field for a few years in New York. She was also trained as a middle school and high school teacher in social studies. During her time as a middle school teacher she worked in Bronxville, which is located in Westchester, New York. However, she decided to take a sabbatical from teaching to have three of her five children and began a part time position at a college in Rockland County, New York. She became their director of weekend college, which was a program for adults who were coming to school to get their Bachelor's degree. Classes were one weekend a month and had a hybrid approach. Programs included nursing, business, the arts, occupational therapy, and associate arts. It allowed for these adults to spend time with their families and work while still taking a full course load. Professor Brennan also taught in their education department, which helped her gain experience that she would later use at Monmouth University.

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Professor Brennan originally came to Monmouth in 2004 to be a supervisor for student teachers. She was asked to teach a course called Psych of Exceptional Individuals at the graduate level as an adjunct. Walking to Bey Hall one day she realized how peaceful and beautiful Monmouth was and how happy she would be if she continued teaching there. Eventually a full time position opened up a year later and she was asked to apply. Currently she teaches special education classes as well as the learning disability teacher consultants program.

Professor Brennan teaches students at the undergraduate and graduate level. According to Professor Brennan there are clear differences between the two. Undergraduates are still in the learning process while graduates can take the experiences they have from working in the classroom and apply them to what they are learning. Professor Brennan enjoys teaching undergraduates more because they are more challenging and have a desire to learn as much as possible. She says they are like sponges because they take in all the new information.

When Professor Brennan first began teaching at Monmouth University people were closer to one another. There were fewer faculty members and fewer buildings on the campus. Years ago there was a faculty dining area in what is now the Magill Commons Club. Faculty members could eat lunch together and meet each other. Once the faculty members increased, the faculty dining area was taken away.

In terms of the community surrounding Monmouth, it was less crowded in 2004 with the cars and houses. The growth of the University has not taken away from the community though. In many ways, Professor Brennan believes the community has had a positive influence on Monmouth. It has helped Monmouth maintain its beauty, especially with the height of the buildings. There are no skyscrapers and that is because of the community's restrictions.

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Some of the other biggest changes since 2004 are with the buildings including new residence halls, a renovated library, the addition to the business school, 24 hour computer labs, and the MAC. Professor Brennan believes that the MAC has become a center and anchor for the students and faculty on campus both culturally and socially.

Professor Brennan is a supporter and fan of the sports on campus. She makes an effort each semester to see her students compete in whatever sport they are involved in. She also supports the band. She does this so her students can see that she supports them outside the classroom as well as inside the classroom. Professor Brennan describes this as an extra piece that she believes all faculty members should be doing. She also believes that all students should be involved in some type of extracurricular activity because it helps them become better leaders.

Professor Brennan explains that some of her favorite memories occurred in her classes and in her role as the advisor for Kappa Delta Pi, the education honor society. She has been the advisor for the past 8 years and enjoys the induction ceremony. The induction ceremony is once a year in Wilson Auditorium and includes the students, faculty, parents, and friends of the students. Professor Brennan describes the ceremony as a time for students to take pride in their hard work and find meaning in it. It brings in the family/community spirit. During Kappa Delta Pi meetings students who graduated will come back and talk to the undergraduates about the interviewing process and what they did after graduation. This shows students that, even though they graduated, that does not mean they are forgotten.

Professor Brennan's favorite class that she teaches is the undergraduate assessment class for special education students. 70 percent is learning by doing, which she believes will be beneficial to her students in the future. Some classes should be more lecture-based, but education classes should be more engaging. She believes all education majors should take a class like this

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because the students learn real life skills they will use in the classroom to assess their students. At the start of every assessment class Professor Brennan will have her students find their learning style whether it is visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile. She makes sure her teaching styles match her students' learning styles so they learn as well as they can. Then at the end of the semester Professor Brennan will look at the surveys her students did to assess her strengths and weaknesses. Professor Brennan mentions that the students who have special needs at Monmouth add a new dynamic to the classes. It gives other students opportunities to see what is really involved in teaching students with special needs.

The most rewarding part of being a professor at Monmouth for Professor Brennan is being able to teach students of all different ages. She enjoys seeing her students transform from student to teacher and then seeing them in the field years later. This cycle of success and preparedness in the students is truly rewarding for Professor Brennan. The other part that is very rewarding is with the Monmouth community. She can see the spirit of the faculty wanting something good for their students.

In October of 2014 Professor Brennan took over as interim dean for the School of Education. The previous dean, Lynn Romeo, decided she would retire and Professor Brennan would assume the role temporarily. Professor Brennan continued teaching in the fall semester, which she said was overwhelming. In the spring 2015 semester she took on the role full time and did not teach any classes. Her administrative experience helped her as dean and she was able to reach a new level with the faculty. She used her time as dean to lay the groundwork for what the new dean would do when he assumed the role in June of 2015.

In February of 2015 Professor Brennan opened the speech clinic at one of Monmouth's satellites. This clinic was very professional and currently has over 70 clients. Her overall role as

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dean was busy but very successful. She decided not to remain in the position as dean because she wanted to be back in the classroom teaching. She had been an administrator for 18 years before coming to Monmouth and, although that was a good experience, Professor Brennan wanted to be back in the classroom.

Professor Brennan has spoken at many different conferences both nationally and internationally. These conferences helped her have a better understanding of global education and facilitated the sharing of ideas. They have inspired her to bring cultural education into her classroom and taken her out her comfort zone to learn about other country's education programs. Faculty members are also required to stay current in their fields and one way to do that is by attending conferences. Monmouth gives the faculty a stipend to travel and attend conferences. Faculty members must apply for the conference and submit their proposal if they want to speak at it. If they are accepted, then they go back to Monmouth and present their proposal to the university. The university will give them a certain amount of money for the conference and the faculty member must come up with the rest of it on their own.

Currently, the Monmouth faculty is trying to create a two week study abroad trip in January which would allow education students to study abroad while still having an endorsement. The trip would be three credits and give the students the experience of learning about another country. It would be a cultural based experience.

Technology in the classroom has had the biggest impact on the classes at Monmouth since Professor Brennan has been here. There is the stock market room in the business building, the labs in the science building, and either smartboards or computers in every other classroom. Professor Brennan believes classes must be adjusted to teach students the positives of technology since it is prominent in society today. Technology has also created new opportunities for students

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who, 30 years ago, could not attend college. There are cellphones, the internet, and wheelchairs that have improved experiences in the classroom and opened up the communication world. The only negative is losing the element of personal communication and public speaking. The younger generation has more of a reliance on technology than the older generation since they grew up with it, which is both positive and negative. Professor Brennan points out that this emergence of technology does not only apply to education majors, since technology is used in every career.

President Paul Gaffney was the president of Monmouth when Professor Brennan first began teaching. She describes him as personable and mentions his famous handshake. He was in the military so his approach to education was very structured, which led to new programs and buildings like the MAC. Professor Brennan believes that President Gaffney was focused on the students' needs and activities. She talks about how President Gaffney was memorable after meeting him and could be seen walking around campus. The current president, President Paul Brown, has a different approach. He is more focused on academics such as creating new programs and addressing experiential learning.

According to Professor Brennan the future of Monmouth will be influenced by what is happening in the world. She predicts that growth will be at the graduate level. Currently there is only one doctorate program, which is nursing. Professor Brennan believes there will be more doctorate programs in the future. She believes the future will also include more diversity beyond students from the tri-state area. Presently she believes diversity is limited and the way to address this issue is through the academic programs that Monmouth has. She believes her future at Monmouth will be centered on the student teachers and expanding graduate programs.

Professor Brennan leaves with a note about the tradition at Monmouth. Often it is overlooked but still incredibly important. Projects like this create an oral tradition that will help

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create an opportunity to go back and learn. Tradition builds a strong cultural foundation at Monmouth and that will help contribute to the future. Professor Brennan truly loves Monmouth University and has made notable contributions to improving the experience of the students and faculty.