

Oral History Interview with Amanda Bales, Mail Services, Western Oregon University, conducted by Lucas Agee, Quaid Baldes, Libby Jensen, Kailyn Rodli, Lizzie Saager, and Hailee Stewart on April 27, 2026 in the Welcome Center of Western Oregon University. Professor Kimberly Jensen joined the group.



Narrator: Amanda Bales

Interviewers: Lucas Agee (LA), Quaid Baldes (QB), Libby Jensen (LJ), Kailyn Rodli (KR), Lizzie Saager (LS), Hailee Stewart (HS), Kimberly Jensen (KJ).

LJ: Hello, we are so happy to be talking to you today. I am Libby Jensen, my other interviewers are Quaid Baldes, Lucas Agee, Lizzie Saager, Kailyn Rodli, Hailee Stewart, [and Kimberly Jensen], and today we're interviewing Amanda Bales, on April 27th, 2026. Our first question is, when did you start working at Western [Oregon University], and what were the circumstances that led you to come to work at Western?

AB: May 29th, 2000, was my first day here. So, I've lived in the area for my entire life, my parents both graduated from here when it was O.C.E [Oregon College of Education], and I'm a big fan of being comfortable, and knowing what I'm getting into. At the time I was going to be an Elementary Ed. [Education] major, so I came here. I actually got employed as a student, literally right out of high school, my dad had worked here at that time. God, since 1975, so there was, you remember Doris [Clark] I think?

KJ: Yes.

AB: The person who was the mail services, you know, person at the time was losing a bunch of her students, and so she snagged up my application, I interviewed and started work here that summer. The summer before I started my freshman year here at Western. So yeah, it's been a minute. [All laugh] Was there a second part to that? I'm sorry.

LJ: No, I'm trying to think of a follow-up [question] but I don't have anything...

LA: We can move on to the second question. What different work positions have you had here?

AB: So, worked here as a student from beginning [in 2000] to 2002, I think it was September. I worked as a Mail Services student and then I also worked on the front desk of, at the time it was called the Physical Plant [now Facilities Services]. Did dispatch for them. I was on paint crew . . . what else? I'm sure there was some other stuff in there, too, but I don't remember what. And

then in 2002 I decided to take a break, because I didn't know what I wanted to do anymore. I had volunteered at my Mom's kindergarten class and realized, "Oh my God, I hate this!" [All laugh]. So, Elementary Ed was out. And so, I didn't want to spend a lot of money to not know what I wanted to do, and at that time it wasn't such a big deal, you could just take a break, and it was fine. So, during that time, I met someone, got married, he has three kids. So that kind of absorbed all of the time and I came back to school in . . . I want to say spring term of 2005. And at that time, I was just taking classes, I was working on paint crew around the same time, and Doris came back to me and said, "Hey, do you want to take your old job back?" And I was like, "Sure, but I've got kids now, so I can't like, I'm not as flexible anymore." She was really great about working around what I needed. So, during that time, I had three kids, and was doing classes, and working. Which I think is kind of normal for all of y'all. I only had one job when I was going to college. And I was only taking like 16 credits. And now I have students that are taking . . . Daphne's in IS [Interdisciplinary Studies] and she's taking 22 credits! And she's working 25 hours a week for me. And she's like graduating with honors! And I graduated with a 2.6 [Grade Point Average]. But I got out. [All laugh]. So, what was the question again?

LA: And, also, just to add on to that. What is your current job at Western and how long have you had this position, specifically?

AB: So, I'll back up. I graduated in 2008, which was like prime, great time for the economy to get a job [All laugh]. And I was unemployed for a while until I got this amazing job at Ross Dress for Less and I was working 15 hours a week, was the most they would give me. And I had to drive Corvallis to do it. And finally got a little bit more work and a little bit more work and then a job came open here at Western in the Business Office actually, and I got that position in January of 2011. Then my predecessor retired from here and I applied and got the Mail Room job and I have been in that position in the Mail Room since September of 2011. So, going on 15 years now.

LA: All right, I think that wraps up Question 2.

KR: Our third question for you is: would you give us examples of the kinds of work you do?

That could be like a typical workday, if you have a typical workday or...?

AB: [Gestures to LS] I mean you've gotten to see some of it [Laughs]. So, I—I'll give you a really good indication of everything. So, when I started as a student in 2000, we would get around...let's see...so we have these mail totes that are about like this [Gestures]. We would get about twelve of those a day and they would be full of letters—not letters, magazines and newspapers because, and this'll really date me, the Internet wasn't a big deal back then, so all of the correspondence was coming through the mail. So every department on campus—so we have, if you come into my office you'll see a bunch of sorting areas and it's all 70 of the departments we deliver to on campus, and each one of those would have a stack of about like that, [Gestures] of letter mail, between checks and signed documents and transcripts because all of that was sent through snail mail...because we had dial-up, maybe! I think the year that I started here was the year Doris got a computer—yeah it's been a while! So, we got maybe—I think a rough day was like 60 packages, and that was mostly for campus. So we got some of the same stuff shipped that we do now between like books, and the Science Department still gets specimens to dissect and you know, do all that stuff with. But Amazon still only sold books! Only sold books. So it was not usual to see anything personal or even personal adjacent coming through. And I remember the first summer I was working here we got 100 packages in one day, and it was just, “Oh my gosh, what are we gonna do?” I had to get help, and we're talking packages no bigger than [Points] this backpack right here, like that was the biggest one—maybe. So that was when I was a student.

When I started here managing the place in 2011, it had decreased in volume, for the letter mail, to about 30% of what we used to have. But packages were a different story. I think the first year that I worked here—and I started keeping benchmarks on this because I like spreadsheets and I thought it was interesting to see how things had changed. So the first year that I was here the average amount of packages we would get in a day was 70. It was about 125 if you're just counting during the school year, but during the summer it goes way down because all y'all move out. The amount of packages we would get for students had gone up quite a bit because you could actually order online and stuff now. And it just kind of steadily increased. To the point where now we're probably getting about 5% of letter mail that we used to get 26 years

ago, and the average packages that we get now is close to 300. So...that's been fun! Obviously, technology has advanced since then to make our jobs a little easier. When I started as a student, Doris would make these tags for us so that—like this piece of paper was cut up into 9 different pieces of paper and we would write the tracking number, and the recipient, and the date, and then we would have a little space for them to sign. So then when we were done with our runs we would come back and we would have this stack of papers and she would keep them for like three years. Now fortunately we have a much more advanced situation where my students have an app on their phone where they can go and they scan your packages—I know one of you lives here, maybe more of you lives here...whoever lives here...you get the notifications now, we send it over to the Residential Service Center. So a typical day now, is I have, actually the volume has gone up quite a bit but my staff has gone down quite a bit, because, money! I have four students, the most I've ever had is eight. They don't typically—I mean the most hours I usually dole out is around 60 for the week. We're at 30 right now. I'm gonna do my best to save the university money. I think the average is about 300 packages a day. Most of that is for the residence halls. That is where we place most of the priority on deliveries is getting everything to the residence halls, because they pay to be here and campus, you know, they have services and stuff that they need but they can also walk over to the mailroom and get it because that's their job. In a typical day my students will go to the post office, pick up the mail, bring it back here, and then we have deliveries from FedEx, UPS [United Parcel Service], FedEx ground, DHL, Amazon, and OnTrac. And we just kind of process those as they come in. So some days it's really chill, there'll be nothing, especially on postal holidays and stuff there's very little to do. But then you get days like the second week of fall term where I think this year we had 500 in one day. So it's a little uneven.

The most packages we've ever had in one day was 900, but that was during COVID—COVID was...that was a lot, that was dramatic. But anyway, I think we had like 250 today. So there really isn't a typical kinda week or day or anything, but yeah, I rely on my students a lot because I used to do all their jobs and now I don't and I don't have a clue how to do it. I'm training a new person and they keep asking me questions and I'm like, "I have no idea, can you text someone because I'm gonna give you the wrong information and then you're gonna

just be really lost.” So, hopefully that answered the question.

KR: Yeah! I think that’s great.

LS: Our fourth question is: what is the most interesting experience you’ve had while working at Western?

AB: I mean there’s a lot. [Laughter] Uhm - COVID was definitely - definitely interesting. Umm – So - yeah none of you were here. Okay. Yeah, this was a long time ago. So—[To Professor Jensen] were you on sabbatical or were you here?

KJ: I was here – March 2020 (so when we had to pivot)...

AB: Gotcha.

KJ: And then I was here the next year where it was all remote...

AB: Okay.

KJ: And then I was on sabbatical the year after that...

AB: Gotcha. Okay. So. Yeah. Like Dr. Jensen said, we pivoted hard, in March. So I’ve moved (physically moved) the mailroom – I’m in my third location now (which if you think about it is a little nuts because – anyway). So, was in Facilities (like where the Physical Plant is right now), moved to ITC [Instructional Technology Center] 111 (which was the basement of the ITC room), which I actually really loved being there. And now we are here in the Welcome Center, which is a much better situation. But I moved here in February of 2020. The building was still not done, so they had to get us out of ITC and over here quickly because they had to – there was some kind of a grant or something with making ITC earthquake-safe, and so they had to basically move everyone out of that building. And everyone else was just (not just) – everyone else could more

easily be transplanted because they were professors and they could be moved around a bit more. But I have equipment, and I have to have other people know where I am, so they had to actually build my room and my office before everyone else's. So I was in this building. There was no running water, there were no toilets, there was no heat for a minute [Laughs] ...

KJ: Oh my gosh.

AB: That's to say, everything worked out, the contractors were amazing, they brought us everything we needed – but then the university shut down. For two weeks. And everybody was gone, except for me (okay there was a lot of other people here too). But most of us didn't see each other – I was completely alone in this building, 100%. And everything still kept coming in, and then I had – because it was – I mean, I don't know if y'all remember, but because of the quickness of how it went down – I mean there was no system in place, at all. There was no – like this is not normal, so we have no policies, we have no rhythm to – adjust to this and so I had a lot of professors coming in to me (especially Creative Arts) between Art, and – the places that are more physical as opposed to just online stuff and so – oh, Natural Science too. They [Staff and professors] were bringing me care packages, like for – Paula [Paula Booth] would come in and she would drop off – “This is the package of supplies that we need for this class.” So my – how many packages I send out on a daily basis increased by 450%. [Takes a deep breath] And I was alone. I had students, I had amazing students that were here during that time and I wish I could have paid them more. But – yeah – all the buildings were closed and locked, so we kept a lot of the stuff here because people kept ordering things. And we couldn't get into the buildings. So eventually it did get worked out, we got access to the buildings, we kind of worked through into a normal – But that year - this is probably the most interesting thing – interesting (I really enjoy solving problems, and so that's why this was very interesting to me) – graduation was a little weird. Because they didn't really know what they were gonna do – so – they decided – and I found out about this on social media too which was great – they decided they were going to mail out graduation packages to all of the graduates that year. And I saw that on Instagram and I actually commented and was like, “I'm sorry what?” [Laughs] Umm – I don't think it came across in the post but I was a little panicked, and I asked

them I was like, “So how many are you guys sending out?” And they’re like, “Oh I’m sure someone will [Laughs] be in contact with you.” But that was the moment where they were like, “Oh yeah, we should probably contact her.” So, the packages we had put together – and – we – kudos to Amy Clark, in the Registrar’s Office, she was amazing at facilitating this – and also Rip Horsey. Could not ask for better people to manage all of this. So, all three of us got together, Amy gave us all the information, for all of the graduates. The Registrar’s Office had to reach out to each one of the people, people had to respond as to whether they wanted to walk (I think we had some kind of a caravan situation), whether they wanted their stuff mailed to them or whether they wanted to be picked up. Most people wanted it mailed to them. So if it was being mailed, it went to me next. I then had this amazing spreadsheet that I had coded in everybody’s V Number [Western Oregon University student identification number], so that it matched them up with their legal name, then the name that they wanted on their – like everything, and then their – what their major was, what color of tassel that [Someone laughs] was associated with, whether they were honors whether they were veterans’ cords or whether they had disability cords, and then I came up with a coding system so that it would print out their shipping label and then have the code at the bottom. Once I got all of those printed out – and we would do – in total I think we ended up sending about a thousand out. So I would print out a daily list of those and get them to Rip, who then had all of the stuff over there. And so he would give the students the code, and then the students (based on the code) would see, “Okay, they did want this, this is the color of cord, this is the diploma.” And they would assemble all of these boxes. And then when they were done, we would come over, pick them up, and take them to the post office. And that was – that was nuts. It was – at first it was kind of cool to be a part of it, because – I don’t know we’re just student support, we don’t necessarily like, get involved with the students to that degree. So it was really really nice to be involved. And I had a lot of students who would call me at like – specifically and say like, “Hey I’m looking for this.” And it was just very – I loved being able to solve the problems. And so I think it went well – we also sent out all of the Lavender Graduation [Western Oregon University’s LGBTQ+ student graduation] packages, we sent out Black Graduation [Western Oregon University’s Black student graduation], we sent out MSSP [Multicultural Student Services and Programs], we sent out pretty much all of the organizations on campus that do graduation ceremonies, or award ceremonies (like through different divisions and stuff), we

sent out boxes through all of them. To the point where I had to go to the Business Office and tell them, “I need \$25,000 for postage.” And they’re like, “Why? How are you going to recoup [recuperate] that?” And I’m like, “I’m not, you guys wanna send it out, so – I need this money.” So we sent out I think something like \$35,000 worth of postage over those two months. And – just the amount of packages coming in actually didn’t slow down either. Packages per person who lived here was still around five to eight per – god what was it? – per week? I think? So we were still doing all of that – and – you know I – I work with a lot of really great people, I wasn’t super happy with the – people who were in charge at the time, because Rip and I were completely forgotten through all that (I’m gonna be salty for a minute). So we did all that work, and the email that was sent out as like a thank you? Completely disregarded us. And at first I was like, “Okay, well, maybe whatever. It’s fine.” But then Amy Clark actually emailed the president [Western Oregon University President] and was like, “These people need to be thanked too.” So he forwarded the email to myself and Rip and said, “You two should have been involved in this too, thank you.” Full disclosure, not the current president [Laughs]. This was Rex Fuller, so. Oh – that was just – it was rough, but it was a really interesting experience, and you definitely get to know the workings of the university a lot more thoroughly than you anticipate [Laughs], and probably ever wanted to. So yeah, that was probably the most interesting thing. I think I’m working over into Zach Hammerle’s [Zachary Hammerle’s interview] timeframe here aren’t I? [Laughs]

KJ: It’s great.

AB: Okay [Laughs].

LS: It’s very interesting, but like, the fact that first you found that out from an Instagram post and then they shirk you on the thank you is [Sighs] crazy.

AB: And I just – (I have to repeat) there really was no precedent, for anything. There really wasn’t – I know I’m not the only one that went through that kind of stuff, working with the union, we went through a lot of other stuff too when it came to employees being displaced, employees not having communication, because again, there was just no – this was unheard of, so

I have to give a little bit of grace in that sense, but like – come on. [Everyone laughs] Please.

HS: What are your plans and goals at Western now and for the future?

AB: So I jokingly tell my students every year when I fill out. Cause my job isn't the one that has goals, I guess, like it's kind of just maintaining the status quo. When I try and keep ahead of the curve and I try to anticipate changes, but you really just can't on some of them. So I always tell my students that in my self-evaluation every year, when they ask that question. I always put down my goal is not to set anything on fire this year. So, 15 years running. [All laugh]

Nobody's complained that I put that down yet. I mainly my goal is to just keep things moving and create an environment where students feel like they are priority. Even if it's a little, even if it's behind the scenes. I and I am really I love, I love working with students. They're the only ones that I get to hire and work with on a daily basis. And so it's, it's really nice and I jokingly tell them like, "It's because I know you guys are gonna leave soon, so you're not gonna get sick of me, and I'm not going to get sick of you. It's going to be great." And that, having worked there as a student, I try to create an environment, where they can get the training that they need and feel like they're not stuck or obligated to stay. Because I don't, I pay minimum wage, and it doesn't look that great on a resume, but it does point you in the direction to talk to everyone on campus. So you can get something that does look great on a resume. So I encourage people to, you know reach out talk to people while you are on a route, cause ask any of my students they know a lot of people. So if I can push them in that direction, then I feel like I succeeded, so yeah. I have I've gone through 52 students. I have had 52 students, and they all have signed my locker in my office. Desi Root is still there. [All laugh]

QB: Last question: What else would you like to add about your experiences working here?

AB: . . . I don't know that I'm the best person to say this 'cause this is one of the only places I've ever worked and I kind of make fun of people who are like, "Yeah, I worked here my entire life." But it really has been a very good place to work for the most part... It's not perfect by any means and I again, working with the union, [am] one of the first people to point out specifically where the problems are and I think that although I sometimes feel very stuck here my area of expertise

is very niche; this does not translate well to anything else. My degree is in Psychology. I have a Master's Degree I'll probably never use, I mean it's [from] 2008. But I try and use it where I can and just getting involved everywhere has been helpful. I don't know if I can... What was the question? I'm so sorry.

QB: What else would you like to add about your experiences working here?

AB: It's a good place [All laugh]. It is, I think, the biggest takeaway probably for me is that people don't work here because they're making tons of money, they really don't, they come work here because the community means a lot to them and the students that come here mean a lot to them. First Gen [Generation], HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution), all of that is so important, I mean, honestly, we've been an unofficial HSI since I was here. It's always been a very strong Hispanic serving community centered area. It's definitely had its ups and downs, but we try and make a community that protects people and supports them in unconventional and sometimes very unconventional ways. The people that have been here forever are here making a specific effort to be here, because there's a reason for it. So as Mr. Rogers would say: "Find those people, find the helpers, they're the ones that are here for a reason and that reason is not money, and that's okay." [All laugh]. And it's okay if you leave because you want money, that's completely fine. I happen to just be in a very good area to be able to keep doing this and I'm comfortable. I have a very large office [All laugh] so it doesn't hurt.

KJ: May I barge in? I just can't help myself. May I ask a question? This is Professor Kimberly Jensen, and I just can't help myself! I've had so many students that have worked with you, especially some very beloved students and they are so glad that they have worked with you, they've learned so much. You are just a favorite among faculty, and one of the reasons is because of Mystery Package. Could you talk just a tiny bit about the Mystery Package? It's so much fun.

AB: Yes. So, one of the most interesting and one of the banes of my existence at Western is mystery packages when they come through. So, every day, and this is not a one-off, this is every single day, we will get a package that is just simply addressed to "Western Oregon University."

Honestly though, over the years, the reason why I don't send out those emails as much is I can tell where they're supposed to go based off of where they're coming from. We have packages that go to Valsetz [Dining Hall], specifically, that are addressed to "Western Oregon University G," just the letter "G." That's it. And I know those go to Valsetz. Because I've been here too long. So, I'm kind of able to deduce, ok, I'm pretty sure this is where it goes. But every once in awhile I'll get a really weird one. I think the one that you're thinking of most is, got a package one time that was just addressed generically -- and also to an addendum to this, this is only for packages that come to 345 [Monmouth Avenue N., the campus address]. We don't open student mail. Ever. It will stay in my office forever before we will open it in hopes that someone will come collect it. But I'll get to that in a minute. So, the mystery packages that come for the business side, I do have the authority to open them, to _____ [decide?], but I don't want to do that as a general rule, because sometimes that just creates more questions than it answers. So, one day, we got this package and it was just from Amazon and it was to "Western Oregon University," and I opened it up and it's the vintage "Mystery Date Game." Which isn't necessarily that weird, because we get things for Student Engagement, we get things for departments that are giving prizes to students. On a regular basis we get things like iPads and stuff like that that are specifically for prizes. And I've just kind of learned that over the years when I open it up and I see that there's an iPad in there going to some random professor, it's probably business-related. And so, I had to send out an email to everyone on campus, and I just label it "Mystery Mail" or "Mystery Packages," or whatever in the beginning. And I honestly can't remember specifically what I said because it has been so long. But I sent an email out that basically said "Hello everybody! I have a mystery package here that actually contains the "Date Game" or what is it the "Mystery Date Game." And the amount of people that will respond to my emails, because they think it is so funny. I think it's hilarious. I don't get to see a lot of the responses to it, but I routinely get a lot of comments from people saying, "Oh, we just love your emails!" And I'm just like, why? It's so weird.

KJ: Well, and you're hilarious, you have these really great, funny ways of describing this.

AB: Well, I figure if you are going to send out that many emails, because lately I've been sending out emails that are like, "Hey, everybody! Someone's sick. You're not getting your mail today." And so that gets really boring after awhile and so I try and fancy it up. The last email I sent was in the style of Lady Whistledown from Bridgerton [the British Regency romance television series]. Then the one before that, it was in Klingon [from the Star Trek television and film franchise]. You've gotta make it interesting, otherwise no one is going to read it. I think I got 45 replies to the Bridgerton one, one of which was the lawyer on campus, and it scared the hell out of me, because all I could read in the byline, the reply said "don't ever" . . . and I was like, "Oh my God, oh no!" And I opened it up and he was like, "Don't ever stop doing this." And I'm like, "Ohhh, ok, ok, we're good."

KJ: We love them. You are wonderful.

AB: You've got to take enjoyment wherever you can. 'Cause sometimes that's the only thing that breaks through the mundaneness.

KJ: Thanks. Thank you.

AB: Of course.

LJ: Well, thank you so much for joining us today. We really enjoyed hearing about everything that you do here, and where you find enjoyment and where you don't find enjoyment, and everything in between. It's been a pleasure talking to you!

AB: Thanks for meeting with me.

LS: Thank you very much.