

Oral History: The Peace Studies Program: From Mundelein to Loyola

Memoir Interview Number 1: Dr. Kathleen McCourt

Interviewed by Kathleen Ermitage January 22, 2015  
Evanston, Illinois

Edited Draft

*Context: This interview was conducted at Dr. Kathleen McCourt's home in Evanston. Her young granddaughter was in another room during the interview. There is some minor traffic noise at points during the interview.*

**00:00**

Kathleen Ermitage: I'm with Kathleen McCourt who is going to be our narrator for the Peace Studies Oral History Project with Loyola University. My name is Kathleen Ermitage. I am the researcher. And we are meeting on January 22, 2015 in Evanston, Illinois.

I'd like to begin by asking you to again state your name and your title with Loyola.

Dr. Kathleen McCourt: Sure. I'm Kathleen McCourt. I'm currently an Emeritus Professor at Loyola Chicago. Started at Loyola in 1976 as an assistant professor of Sociology. Actually, I had worked there previously as a part-time instructor for several years. I was in the Sociology Department for 25 years. Became an associate professor and then a full professor of Sociology. And from 1989 to 1998, I was Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Kathleen: Thank you. Very good. Thank you for that introduction. I gave the questions that we had for the project. We spoke a little bit by phone. One of the things that I have been doing in looking through some of the research is kind of tracking the history of some of the events at Mundelein and at Loyola that were focused on Peace Studies. And, it's my understanding that Loyola had an interest in incorporating the Peace Studies as a minor. We'd love to hear your perspective on that at that period of time. So, in the late 80's and early 90's it's my understanding that there were efforts underway to bring that program to Loyola. Could you talk a little about that?

Dr. Kathleen McCourt: There were a couple of things going on. There was a great deal of faculty interest at Loyola, as you say, in the 80s, around issues of peace and justice. And there was a group started called "Faculty and Staff Initiatives for Peace and Justice." There were a lot of staff involved as well. And, this group would come together periodically and sponsor speakers and workshops and programs and develop courses. And take some initiatives for actions on campus, for example, we can come back to talk more about this, but it was very active in trying to get Loyola to disinvest from stock in South Africa. That was part of a big national movement at that time. So there was an interest among Loyola faculty and staff in the 1980s. But, when we merged with Mundelein ... when Mundelein College became part of Loyola University around 1991, they already had a Peace Studies Program. They also had a faculty that was very committed to Peace Studies. And we began some conversations between the two groups of faculty in order to see how we could further the interest that both faculties had in peace studies and maybe make it part of the curriculum through a minor.

Kathleen: I noticed in some of the research that we found a list of different people on the committee. It was clear that there was a multidisciplinary approach that was being brought to bear, or brought together. Could you explain a little bit about the reasons for

that? Um. Some of the notes that I saw had everything to do with the fact that there was a focus on environmentalism, there was a natural science perspective, and other kind of academic disciplines ... that it is my understanding that the whole idea was that the students were already interested in some of this, but maybe they needed some kind of structure to put together something ... or to explore that field of study on their own. They were already kind of dabbling in it but that its minor was a way to kind of structure it.

Dr. McCourt: Just to back up a little bit ... as a research university Loyola was very departmentally based and still is, of course. But, in the 1980s Loyola didn't have as much of a history of interdisciplinary programs as it does now. And, the core curriculum was divided by disciplines and that was the heart of the liberal arts education at Loyola.

### **05:00**

And, then of course there were majors and there were minors. But there weren't a lot of interdisciplinary programs. There are many more now. And, that really opened up, I think, in the 1990s. It was one of the things that ... when I became Dean I was very supportive of interdisciplinary programs and I worked with faculty who were also supportive of that. I had been involved in starting Women's Studies, for example. And, we also got Latin American Studies and African American Studies and so on as minors for students. So, there was a lot of faculty interest. But faculty were coming from their particular disciplines. And, faculty had to work together. At that point my role was as an administrator rather more than as a faculty member. Although I had been involved earlier when I was Chair of the Sociology and Anthropology Department and as a faculty member in Sociology. So, faculty had to work together to develop an interdisciplinary course that was an introduction to Peace Studies.

But I think there were a few other things going on there too. I think that at the time of the merger there were a lot of good-hearted efforts on the part of the faculty of both institutions to kind of work together and see what was important to the other faculty. And, some of the faculty coming over from Mundelein very much wanted to see their program continued. So, even though the faculty initiatives that had been going on at Loyola for a decade, I would say, had not focused as much on curriculum development -- they had focused more on programs and actions on campus -- now there was a good incentive I think to really bring it into the curriculum and really develop a curriculum . curriculum. And as you said, there was a lot of student interest as well. And there were isolated courses in different departments. And this was the chance to bring it together and form a very strong, multidisciplinary minor.

Kathleen: Very good. You already kind of touched on one of the other questions that we had a little bit in that is: what were some of the obstacles? I imagine, and have read, that, you know, with Mundelein closing that had to be very challenging for many people. And then, the idea (I would think) of taking a program that had a very rich and varied history (marching at Selma, being involved with the United Farm Workers effort) and being able to keep it going in some way at Loyola was a great opportunity. But I imagine with there

being any change, just like there have been many changes ... there had to be some obstacles along the way. Would you be able to share any information about that from your perspective?

Dr. Kathleen McCourt: Well, I think one of the challenges, as I have said, at that point Loyola didn't have a long history of interdisciplinary programs. And I think that also Loyola's ... one of Loyola's strengths as a research university was a commitment to academic integrity and coherence and sort of a rich intellectual content to courses. So, needless to say any new program gets a lot of discussion, got a lot of discussion ... and I'm sure it still does at Loyola and a lot of inspection by a lot of faculty before it even reaches the stage of a faculty council, which gives final approval to any new courses or majors or minors that develop. So there was that whole discussion of bringing over courses, examining the content, looking at how they fit into Loyola's curriculum, looking at how they might be appropriate for Theology credit, or Sociology credit, or History credit, wherever it fit. So, what might appear on the surface ... well we can move this from Institution A to Institution B, is not so simple because faculty need to take ownership of the program and take ownership of the courses and the curriculum and make sure it fits in with the mission of our university, Loyola University, as well.

Kathleen: That makes perfect sense. I like the use of the words "take ownership" ...

Dr. McCourt: Right.

Kathleen: ... because that speaks to the intention of everybody wanting it to be a success.

Dr. McCourt: Yes.

Kathleen: And speaking of that and in reviewing the notes and memos and so on I could see you know the team coming together and I'm wondering if you can talk about some of the people that really did take ownership <[10:00]> and really did emerge as the champions of this effort.

Dr. McCourt: Well, first of all I do want to mention Carol Frances Jegen, Sister Carol Frances, because she was ... she was a role model and an inspiration for all of us at Loyola because, as you mentioned, of her rich history in peace studies and peace activism and her commitment to that whole field. She was a very important player in getting things going. There were also faculty from Theology. Bill French was very committed to it. Father Joseph Boels was a Jesuit who was at Loyola at that time and he was quite active and committed to it. In Philosophy David Schweickart had been very involved in international peace issues. David Ozar was quite involved in moral philosophy and ethical issues. In Sociology, Judy Wittner and Phil Nyden and I had all been involved. There were faculty in history; I remember Prue Moylan. In Political Science ... Peter Schraeder. So there were quite a lot of faculty who were involved... and I'm sure I have

left out a few people. Paul Messbarger, as we mentioned earlier, from English, was quite involved. And, each of those faculty members came at it from their own particular discipline, their own research, their own academic focus ... but found ways ... because as they had over the years ... found ways of talking to each other and working on the program.

Kathleen: Very good. Thank you. OK, one of the things I wanted to follow up with you on was if you could describe Carol Frances Jegen's role and the transition of the program and anything you'd like to say about her as a champion for the work in Peace Studies that she did at Mundelein but then also her role in bringing it over, or trying to make the transition to Loyola.

Dr. McCourt: Well, I think Carol Frances was sort of a moral role model for all of us in terms of what she had dedicated her life to. And I was aware, as were many of the faculty at Loyola, of the work she had done with Cesar Chavez and the farm workers and the work she had done with the civil rights movement and how committed she was to peace in its broadest incarnation, which is nonviolence against all people and against nature, too, actually, as that was spelled out in our peace studies program. I think Carol Frances had had that commitment at Mundelein and wanted to see that program continue at Loyola. And, in my work with her, I got to know her a bit and found her to be a very quiet person, but very, very focused, very dedicated, very committed to getting to the goals that she had in mind. And, of course, I found that to be true of a lot of the BVMs that we worked with during the transition. But, yes, I think that Carol Frances was a very very important part of the history of the Peace Studies program.

Kathleen: I'm wondering now that ... I'm trying to imagine the scene of you working together for the first time and this was in '91 or maybe a little before ...

Dr. McCourt: Yes.

Kathleen: and I noted in one of the forms that you had gone to El Salvador in 1991.

Dr. McCourt: Right.

Kathleen: So, you were bringing some of your own first-hand experience to the program as well.

Dr. McCourt: Right.

Kathleen: And it was part of your interest. I don't know how much it fit into your academic studies or your teaching, but it clearly was an interest of yours.

Dr. McCourt: Well, at that point I was Dean of the College. And I did go to El Salvador with Larry Reuter who was a Jesuit at Loyola then, and a number of our students and a

few faculty and students and Jesuits from Marquette University as well. We went to El Salvador to participate in some of the commemoration exercises that were recognizing the second anniversary of the assassination of the Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter there in El Salvador. And for me that was an incredibly moving experience. I mean, to be there <[15:00]> at a time when the war was still going on in El Salvador. It was a militarized country then. And, to see the . . . to be with the people and to see the work that the Jesuits were doing there. To see the strength of the people there in the face of that kind of violence against those who wanted peace was an incredible experience for me. It really was a transformative experience for me and I suspect for other faculty and students who went there as well. So I suppose that was one of the experiences that helped deepen my commitment to making this program a part of Loyola's curriculum.

Kathleen: I would think so. I figure that's a great thing that you could participate in, but then also you had brought some students with you?

Dr. McCourt: Yes, we did.

Kathleen: OK. And then, do you know if they later became involved in the . . .

Dr. McCourt: You know, I don't. I do know that we ... for several years after that ... we tried to have exchange relationships with the Jesuit university in El Salvador. And we did have some faculty exchanges back and forth and there were some other faculty visits. But, I can't say that I recall what really happened with the students who came with us. They were outstanding students. And they were obviously very dedicated and strong students. So ... I'm sure they had a remarkable experience while they were there.

Kathleen: Sure. That's a nice addition to you know all of the other work that was going on to bring the program together. In other words, it wasn't like an isolated experience to bring the program from Mundelein over to Loyola. There were other events occurring.

Dr. McCourt: Oh, yes. And, the faculty at . . . both Mundelein faculty and Loyola faculty had long histories of being very involved in civil rights work, anti-war work, all different kinds of peace-related activities in their own political lives as well as, very often, in their research or the courses that they taught. So, it was, as you say, a case of bringing a lot of threads together.

Kathleen: Great. Thank you. The next question that we have here is focusing maybe a little bit more ... we talked broadly about Mundelein's program and Sister Carol Frances, and then some of the other events going on at the two universities. And now, I think we are zeroing in on what was your role in bringing the program over um. I understand you had a leadership role. And, you had mentioned earlier that things were reviewed very carefully when they are being considered to be a new program or some new course of study. So, could you describe your role in bringing the program over.

Dr. McCourt: Sure. I think there were a couple of things. One role that I played was helping to introduce the Mundelein faculty to the Loyola faculty and vice versa, introducing the Loyola faculty to the Mundelein faculty, because there was a whole process there. The Peace Studies Program was a piece of a larger process of integrating the two institutions and two faculties. So, there was a larger process going on of Mundelein faculty exploring where they might fit into Loyola's academic structure. Could they fit into a particular department or faculty, for example? Might they be eligible for tenure or a tenure-track position? Or, would they not fit in? Would they see their future in some other way?

And the same with programs. Did the courses that were offered or the programs that were offered at Mundelein ... how many of them had a future at Loyola? So, there was a very thorough review process going on of all of the courses at Mundelein to see how they would fit into Loyola's curriculum ... of all the faculty at Mundelein to see how they could fit into Loyola's faculty. So, a large part of my role at that point was trying to facilitate that review process, trying to help the faculty get to know each other, to see if there was a place for faculty to fit in. And also, this is probably more detailed than you would ever want to know ... but if there was a place for faculty to fit in, then that's a real challenge to an academic administrator because that means we are adding new faculty positions, which is <[20:00]> a huge commitment on the part of the department and the university to add new faculty positions. So, we had to review everything very carefully and very thoughtfully because Loyola was gaining a lot from this affiliation. Mundelein was benefiting from it too; but both institutions were gaining from it. So, there was that review process going on in general. And, Peace Studies was one piece of that.

But the other part of my role was to kind of champion a program that I thought made sense for Loyola. But also, if you know academic culture you know that sometimes it's not always so good for the administrators to take too active a role in that. They facilitate. But the faculty has to ... again as we said before ... take ownership. So, what I could do was bring the faculty together. I could create a committee to explore this program. I could identify the faculty at Loyola who would be interested in working with the faculty at Mundelein. I could help those faculty have some resources so they could meet ... so they could perhaps see how they could benefit from having an additional faculty position, perhaps. And then help support at the level of Faculty Council, Academic Council in the College of Arts and Sciences, and support it up the administration because anything that we recommended in the College also had to be supported by the senior administration and the academic vice president.

Kathleen: That's a great overview. And, I enjoyed how you explained you know the careful process of bringing people together and all of the considerations and all of the considerations you had to weigh. I noted that the process took about three years.

Dr. McCourt: Did it take that long? When was it finally approved? Do you have that date?

Kathleen: I don't have the date. It looked like in '91 there was a memo to have a meeting about the future of the Mundelein program.

Dr. McCourt: Right. That's right. That's when it got started.

Kathleen: And then I noted it was three years later. But as you explained there were a lot of other things going on trying to figure out different ways Loyola may or may not be interested or whether it would be a good fit into Loyola. So, I'm sure there was a lot of activity. Not just ...

Dr. McCourt: That's right. There was a lot of review of curriculum as I recall. Because cCourses had to be developed. Then every course has to be approved. Not only at the department level but at the Academic Council level, every new course. And then how the minor fit together with its own academic integrity was something that I know the faculty spent a lot of time thinking about because peace studies might seem like "oh, it's about peace." But the faculty were thinking about and talking about international affairs and global wars. Are we talking about domestic violence? Are we talking about violence in the family? Are we talking about urban violence? Violence in the cities? Are we talking about violence against nature? Polluting our air and water? What about children who grow up in poverty? Is that violence? So, there was a ... these were wonderful discussions. I mean these were just exactly the kinds of discussions we should be having at a Jesuit Catholic university that's interested in peace and anti-violence. But then that all had to be translated into a curriculum. Well, how do we present this? How do we make sure that this minor ... it's only a minor and not even a major ... covers all of the areas that we think are important, that students get exposed to these different aspects of peace and anti-violence.

Kathleen: Um. That's a great overview, too, because a lot of the literature or the memos I could see the different pieces coming together from different disciplines and what the goal would be for including them. And then even in your selection of a committee ... it was very clear that philosophy was represented, communications ... in fact if I could find it ...

Dr. McCourt: Theology, history, sociology, political science, literature even. They were all represented.

Kathleen: How did you make those decisions? Did you look at the different departments and see what . . .

Dr. McCourt: Decisions about?



Kathleen: About who to select.

Dr. McCourt: Oh. Some of them may have been faculty who volunteered because they had an interest. <[25:00]> I don't recall ... some of them may have been faculty that were asked by the Chair of their department to represent the department. Some of them may have been faculty that I had reached out to because I knew they had a particular interest ... so it could have been any of the combination of those ways that faculty ... some of them would simply be somebody who might have the time ... somebody may have been interested but totally committed to other things that year or maybe not on campus that year. So there were a lot of factors that would go into it. But primarily it was faculty who were committed to the future of the program and wanted to see it succeed.

Kathleen: OK. On that point, you and I had spoken a little earlier about ... and there's a document that's a newsletter "Initiatives for Peace and Justice."

Dr. McCourt: Yes. Faculty and Staff Initiatives for Peace and Justice ... I think it was.

Kathleen: Yeah. And the memo was from 1986. That's of particular interest to me because it was many years before this Peace Studies minor was brought over. So, in that newsletter there were a lot discussion of some international events.

Dr. McCourt: Yes.

Kathleen: And so that group at Loyola ... could you talk a little bit about that group and your interests and how that may or may not have connected to the Peace Studies minor, the development of that?

Dr. McCourt: Yes. It certainly connected. I mean ... as I think I mentioned earlier there were naturally many faculty at Loyola who were interested in issues of peace and justice and had been throughout their professional careers. We're looking at the 1980s, so you have a lot faculty who came there from the '60s and '70s and were very involved like Carol Frances in the civil rights movement, in the anti-Vietnam War movement, in the women's movement, in the Chicano rights movement ... so there were a lot of faculty who had been involved in movements for peace and justice. And many had made that part of their professional interests in courses they developed or their research interest. And there were different ways of expressing that and one way that that had been expressed at Loyola -- because as I recall it was always a challenge to find ways for faculty from different departments to get together because we were so involved in our own departments, because there was so much to do in your own department that you had to find ways to come together. So one of those ways was this faculty initiatives group that would bring faculty who shared interest in whatever issue it was ... the Gulf War, divestment from stock that supported the South African apartheid ... and we came

together to think of ways that we could make that issue visible on campus through speakers, through responding to student interest. There were also a lot of students who were interested in these issues.

I can remember the things we had to do in the Dean's office when students might be drafted to serve in the Gulf War. We had to think about "How do we re-integrate the students back into the university when they get home?" So there were a lot of issues that were touching us in a lot of different ways. And, actually putting that into the curriculum in terms of a formal program of study was one way, and it became a pretty important way and it appears to have succeeded since we just observed earlier that the program is still operating at Loyola as a minor in Peace Studies. I don't know how many students are in the program now. I'd be curious to find that out but at least the program is still going strong.

Kathleen: Yeah ... and then as you described it from the '80s and even stretching back to the faculty being involved in things in the 60s and 70s ... that's quite a legacy to have left at the university. There was always some interest in it. And there was always an awareness of different international events or local events that were connected to that academic discipline, I guess. So you found a way, in other words, to kind of bring together all of that energy and interest and study and frame it and structure in such a way that students had the opportunity to engage with that.

Dr. McCourt: Right. Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

Kathleen: I think that is quite a legacy and that kind of leads to our last question. The question is: What different do you think it makes for Loyola to have such a program? <[30:00]> I think um that that there definitely were a group of committed people there that from the 80s through '91 ... in bringing it together from Mundelein that wanted to stay focused on this effort. You've spoken a little bit about what you think it means for Loyola but could you speak a little bit more even in broader terms.

Dr. McCourt: Well, yeah. I could speak a little bit about what it meant at that time. Of course, I haven't been at Loyola for over a decade. So, I'm not sure how it fits in now. But I don't ... let me just say that the fact that we had a Peace Studies Program was just a continuation of the kind of mission that Loyola and Mundelein already had going. I mean ... it didn't ... it was a way to bring some things together but certainly through Loyola's commitment to social justice. I mean the Jesuit commitment to social justice ... and the academic commitment to a core curriculum where all students would be exposed to studying philosophy, theology, and addressing those questions of morality and the meaning of life and relations with other humans. And, throughout the other parts of the curriculum as well but certainly through the mission of Loyola ... that was always a part of what Loyola was about.

But the Peace Studies Program was a way to bring it together in one more iteration in one more academic program in a way that perhaps reached some students who didn't have other opportunities to do so. So, they could ... what we felt was valuable was that they could see that this course they were taking in sociology that might be looking at the role of women and the role of gender and touching on issues of violence towards women, for example, had some connection to this course in theology that was looking at moral issues of environmental violence or might have some connections to courses in philosophy that were looking at the meaning of God or courses in literature that were looking at a particular strain of American literature that looked at the ... violence against nature or the roles of the military in American history, from history courses.

I mean there are ways of ... the debate among the faculty is always that students can't appreciate interdisciplinary programs until they are well grounded in a discipline. That is, you need to know your own discipline first. You need to understand philosophy or literature or history before you can see how it connects to other disciplines. I actually think that there is a lot of validity to that. But, we're talking about undergraduates who are not going to be that deeply rooted even in a major just as an undergraduate. And this way at least with an interdisciplinary program ... it gives them a chance to see how some of their interests really do connect with other courses they are taking or interests they might have in other fields. And that whole process of integrating knowledge is also key to a Jesuit education. The integration of knowledge, pulling those bits of knowledge together to give meaning to your life and inform your service to others ... has been a historic part of Jesuit education. So, I'm not sure that Peace Studies did anything ... it did something new ... but it really was in many ways a continuation ... a new way of expressing something that had long been a part of Jesuit education and certainly of education at Mundelein as well. Mundelein also had its commitment to Catholic social justice and Catholic education.