Salve Regina Oral History Project

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Narrator: Janet Titus, ‘84

Interviewer: Lindsay Wright, 21

Wright: …The following interview was conducted for the Salve Oral History Project on July 24, 2020. The narrator is Janet Titus, Class of 1984. The interviewer is Lindsay Wright, Class of 2021.

[This interview was conducted via Zoom Communications]

Wright: So to start off, why don't you tell me a bit about your experience growing up in Newport?

Titus: …I was born in Newport - I lived away from there for just two years as my dad was in the military. Anyway, at the time, when you're growing up in a place like Newport, you really don't see all the wonderful opportunities that you have right in your backyard. We thought it was normal that everybody went to the beach every day in the summer… and so in a lot of ways growing up here was… really idyllic. When I was growing up - this would have been like in… the seventies… it was different than it is now obviously, and I guess the biggest difference is the technology. We spent a lot of time outside playing… all day riding our bikes, going places … My son is now nineteen, but I would have never allowed him to just go ride his bike all day you know where I don’t know where he had gone… it's just a different culture now and so I feel kind of lucky for growing up at the time I did. My mom was a stay-at-home mom. There were a lot of kids in my family so… there was always someone to play with or fight with…but still, it was kind of idyllic.

Wright: That sounds amazing! So what led you to choose Salve?

Titus: Well, when I was in high school … it was getting close to the time when we had to apply to colleges… I was listening to all my friends saying, “Oh, I'm applying here, here, here, and I'm going here, here”. And I was just really stressed out at the time as a senior. I was like, “Oh man, I’ve got all this work I have to do” and “I don’t want to be taking time for applying to this and that school… I knew I was going to go to college. So seriously, it was like “I’m just going to apply to Salve.” So I did! They accepted me and I thought I’ll just go here… There wasn’t a whole lot of thought behind it, it was more… something that I had to do. But I'm really glad I did. Another reason too…I was in a big family and so in terms of paying for school, it's not like my parents could have just written a check for that. I was working and paying my own way. And yeah, I could have gone to URI. It probably would have been cheaper. But I really didn't want to go there. A lot of the kids in my high school class who were way into things that I wasn't into, [they] were going to URI and I really preferred not to and to stay home. I had a job. I worked [at] a chocolate store, and some of my friends who were close to me were also going to stay local. So… it ended up being a good choice for me. Now when I was at Salve after about two years, I thought, you know what, I feel like I'm missing out on the college experience, and I thought about transferring. But I ended up staying and I'm glad I did for a lot of reasons. But I eventually went on to a huge university for graduate school and so I'm glad that I had the experience I did at Salve. It was very homey.

Wright: Yeah, I bet. So did you live on campus or were you commuting from home?

Titus: I commuted from home but I lived only like a mile away. My home was practically on campus.

Wright: Yeah, you were probably closer than off campus students right now…

Titus: Yeah, I used to ride my bike right down Shepherd Ave. Or drive. I had a car…

Wright: Alright! And what was your major?

Titus: I double majored in Psychology and Math.

Wright: Alright and how was that? Did you always like Psych and Math or was that just something you found at Salve?

Titus: Well I had taken psychology when I was a high school senior and I just loved it! So I couldn't wait to actually take a psych course when I got to Salve and that first semester I did. I took Intro to Psych with Dr. Walsh.[[1]](#footnote-1) And I remember the day that… He would sometimes do these little pitches for the major in class - and I remember the day when I went up to him and I said I think I want to major in psych. And of course, I was kind of shy, so that was a big deal for me. And then with math, I actually never thought of myself as a strong math student. But my teachers I guess thought otherwise. For me it was a challenge. It was a challenge. And so I thought, ‘well gosh, you know, let me challenge myself.’ I was into challenging myself. So I wanted to challenge myself and I decided first to do a minor, and for me that was a big deal. But then I thought I might as well just do a major. And I used to work a lot at the tutoring center. I used to tutor math students, students who are struggling with math. And they were real happy with the work I did and I eventually caught the eye of Sister Sheila.[[2]](#footnote-2) Her background was math… she was really encouraging me to go into education. She thought I had… some talent as a teacher so I almost triple majored… there was no minor in education at the time. And so for an education major I… ended up doing everything except… I had to take a class in the history of math and I had to do my student teaching. And I had my student teaching set up. This was after I was working at Salve actually. But I was getting ready to go to grad school and I decided not to do the student teaching – I thought I could pick it up in the University community I was going to – but I couldn’t. So looking back, that was a big regret of mine – to not do my student teaching before I went to grad school. So I almost had a major in education, too.

Wright: So at this time, going through the eighties, what was campus life like?

Titus: Wow, what was campus life like? Well now, I was a commuter, so you’re going to get a different perspective. Well, in general, I would say it was… a friendly campus. Now when you say campus life, are you saying like the spirit of the campus or…

Wright: What were the students doing on the weekends, weeknights?

Titus: … I think the kids who were on campus had a very different experience. I think there were a lot of times they’d go out to the pub or Tavern… we used to have a little place on campus called The Boathouse.

Wright: The Boathouse?

Titus: Yeah and I can't remember if they served alcohol or not. But yeah it was this little place called The Boathouse. It was right as you're walking towards Ochre Court, there was, maybe it's like a shed now, storage, I don’t know - they probably store stuff in it.

Wright: Was it like a greenhouse, almost?

Titus: I don’t know what they call it now. You know if you’re walking out of … O’Hare. And you go up the stairs and you go past… I forget the name of it, where the Rose Garden is… You’re going towards this red house with a porch, at least it did have a porch. And right on the left side of that, before you even get to the gate where Ochre Court is, when you come in from the side, there was a little building they called The Boathouse.

Wright: Oh my gosh, I think I did read about that. I think it was called the Cave In at one point, then it probably switched to The Boathouse…

Titus: It was like a student gathering spot… But there were a lot of activities at Salve too. A lot of different activities students were involved in. It’s funny I was just looking at the yearbook before I got on to get my memory primed… Do you want to hear about any of the activities I was involved in?

Wright: Yeah! Clubs, activities, what did you do?

Titus: Well, I was in Sigma Phi Sigma and that was really fun. Do they still have that?

Wright: Is that for psych majors?

Titus: No, Sigma Phi Sigma was a service… what do they call it? It was an Honor Society really. But it was all service-related where the Sigma Phi Sigma kids would do a lot of volunteer work. So we used to work at like the Governor's Ball, and we had these little blue Blazers and the women had gray skirts, the guy had gray pants. They were like our uniforms - with the white tops that looked very eighties with the ruffles! … I still have this big embroidered patch - Sigma Phi Sigma. We would work at the Governor’s Ball. We used to serve drinks… I remember bringing a drink to the governor which I thought was really cool! But yeah, we used to do whatever needed to be done. Maybe we would clean up at the end. We were kind of like the worker bees and I'm sure there are other things that we did that I'm just not remembering. But the Governor's Ball was the big deal. So it was like the service organization, [we were] the do-ers [that] would help out and do stuff… I was in Student Academic Senate, and that was for the math department. I can't really remember much about it but I remember going to meetings you know. But… I took photographs. I was a photographer for the… we had like a little newspaper but it wasn't like a newspaper. I don't know what - it was a newspaper but it wasn't. It didn’t come out that often. But I remember doing that. I used to take photos of the athletes… I remember taking pictures of a cross-country person who was very talented and I remember taking photographs of a skater. Her name was Tyla or Tyler… and she was a very accomplished figure skater. And I remember going out to the ice with her and [I would] take pictures and… sometimes the commuters would get involved in different activities. I remember in the springtime there used to be this, I don't know, like spring weekend or whatever but they had these big cookouts for the students and stuff. I don’t know if you guys still do that but that was really fun. It kind of gave the commuters a chance to join in too. The commuters kind of used to, we all used to hang out together. We had this commuters table and where it is now, I know there’s a lot of changes at O’Hare but when you walk in O’Hare, if you go straight to the back there- now there’s like a café there- but there were all tables and chairs there. And the commuters, like this group I used to hang out with… and it was just fun! We just used to hang out, talk about classes, and events, and you know, everything. So yeah I used to hang out at the commuter’s table. Let's see what else was I involved in? During the time I was teaching, I was involved in a music ministry. I used to play guitar and sing for the Mass held in the chapel in Ochre Court. Brother James from the Music Department was involved with that.

Wright: It sounds like you were very involved for a commuter…

Titus: Yeah, yeah especially given I was a really good student. I was a really hardworking student. I spent a lot of time you know on school work… and I worked. I worked at a chocolate store which I loved. And then tried to be involved as much as I could and so you know it was fun. It really was!

Wright: Yeah! So I heard that you were at Salve during the America's Cup when Newport hosted it. How did that impact your Academic Year?

Titus: Well it kind of moved it a little bit because - I remember the sail team… what do they call it? Team USA? I don't know. They were staying in the dorms. I think they were staying in Miley Hall. Or maybe it was one of the mansions, I’m not sure but it was a dorm. So we had to wait to start our year until they were out. So we didn't even start [until] the beginning of October one year… But as a Newporter… I was involved in that stuff… I remember one time going out on one of the Navy ships to watch one of the races and then when Dennis O'Conner or Conner[[3]](#footnote-3) and his team won, how everybody went walking down-it used to be called The Armory, I don't know, then it turned into- it was right down on one of the wharves. I'm not sure what it is now, I think it was an antique mall for a while. But it was called the Armory. Team USA would disembark and come through the Armory and people were just, I mean the streets were crowded like you wouldn’t believe. I mean you think it’s crowded when all the visitors are here. No way. This was like you couldn’t move. And I remember [the crowd] picking up Dennis O'Connor and carrying him through the streets like he was a hero! That’s when they won the America’s Cup, I can’t remember what year. I don’t know, eighty-something.

Wright: Wow, that’s incredible, oh my gosh. So after you graduated from Salve, you started working here correct? Or did you go to graduate school first?

Titus: No I actually, I wasn’t sure what direction I wanted to go in and so I decided to take a year off. And so I had been working, not [at] the chocolate store. I moved that summer after I graduated to the store next to it, which was a crystal store. It was down at Brick Marketplace, which is Lower Thames. So I was working in there and thinking I don't know what I wanted to do. Some of my friends with my background, [my] math background, were working…on the base… basically for the military. [They worked for] the Defense Department doing computer programming and stuff. And so I was just working in this little store and one night, Sister Lucille[[4]](#footnote-4) and Sister Sheila, and you know a couple of the others, came in and they were just shopping. And I remember I helped them pick out some glasses. They were little champagne glasses that are great for using as like fruit cups. Really pretty! They were super cheap!... They were good, in fact to buy them now, it’s like wow… It was called schott zwiesel crystal. And I have quite a collection myself now. But they bought them because the owner of the store, he would get these good deals and pass them onto the public. So anyways, I helped them buy these really nice little champagne glasses and they started asking me, ‘so what are you doing?’ They knew I had just graduated and I had been a really strong student. I said, ‘Oh, I’m going to take a year off.” And… Sister Sheila was always encouraging me to be a math teacher and when I was a junior at Salve, I had won the math department award that year at the honors convocation. And then as a senior I won the psych department award. And so they knew I was capable, I worked a lot in the tutoring center. That was the other thing. I did a lot in the tutoring center, which was fun! You know, with the students who were struggling. I tutored too for psych but they always came for math. Oh and another thing I used to do, before I graduated, maybe when I was a senior, I TA’d with Sister Therese.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Wright: Oh, okay.

Titus: Sister Therese Antone. She was a math teacher. As a senior, they had asked me to take on a series of… math preparation classes for the students at the time. You had to pass a math competency test and… a lot of students were freaked out about it. So I used to actually teach these prep classes and I guess they got really… good reviews, so Sr. Sheila and Sr. Lucille and Sr. Therese kind of knew that I was capable, and that the students were very positive about their experience with me. So right before- okay I had just graduated- so it was like the end of the summer, I got a call from Doctor Zeuge,[[6]](#footnote-6) the head of the math department- Dr. Zeuge, Jorn Zeuge- and he had been one of my professors. And he said… ‘Well, we’re going to change the way we do things now. We’re going to actually have students take a math competency test… when they’re coming into school and the English competency test to see if they can get them out of the way before they even started. And if they didn't, for math, they were… required to take… Math 111 is what it was called. And I guess they were having [a] need [for] teachers and it was the end of the summer and they really needed people and they asked me if I would do it. So I was like, okay! And actually it was really fun!... I walked into Salve a couple months after I had graduated as a member of the faculty. And… I had a BA, that was it, but [I had] a lot of experience and I was so concerned- my biggest concern seriously was that I looked like a student and I thought these kids are going to take one look at me and be like yeah right, you’re my sister? So I tried really hard to make myself look older and so what that meant for me was… dressing professionally and wearing makeup. I was never into that stuff… and so I went the whole nine yards. The hair, the makeup, the clothes, I wanted to make myself look older. And to me, older was twenty-seven. I was twenty-one at the time. So anyway yeah, I taught that first year… I had three classes. They met five days a week. These were the math classes that met five days a week and it was… college algebra. No trig. It was all what they considered college algebra. And it was the preparation for the kids to take their math competency test. So then in the second semester, they gave me a new class. They gave me the follow-up, Math 112. And I taught that as well, so still three classes. That one only met two or three times a week but the others met you know five days a week and I really enjoyed it. I really did. I really liked the students. It was fun and then of course… getting close to, maybe it was like second semester, and it's like ‘What are you going to do Janet? What are you going to do next year?’… I was young, I was still grappling… with my identity at that point, speaking now as a developmental psychologist, coming from that perspective. I [was]still kind of grappling with ‘who do I want to be?’ ‘where am I going to go?’ ‘what do I want to do?’ and so I decided to work again at Salve for another year. So I did it for another year and the students… they were trying to talk me into teaching calculus. ‘Please will you teach calculus’ [the students would say] I finally rolled over… but they had filled it … but at that point it was like I know I’ve got to do something. Because they are going to ask me again, “Janet what are you doing?” But… it's funny [because] Sister Leona[[7]](#footnote-7) was a real, kind of like a champion for me. Just like Sister Sheila was. She was like ‘Janet, you can't stay on this island. There’s a big world out there. You need to go out and experience the world.” I think she was kind of concerned that I might end up working on the Navy base. At one point, someone had told me “Janet, go to graduate school, and when you get done, come back and teach at Salve.” Anyway … I was really close to my family and so I decided- my brother was out at the University of Minnesota- so I thought well, let me look at that. I looked at a couple of schools. I actually visited Penn State with Sister Elizabeth McAuliffe[[8]](#footnote-8) because she was doing a doctoral program at that time. Is she still there?

Wright: She is! I had her!

Titus: Is she? Oh my God, yeah, she brought me out to Penn State because she was a graduate student at Penn State and she would commute. I mean this was before online learning seriously. She would go out there once every so often and … did distance learning… So she brought me out there and I met with their educational psychology department because I was thinking, okay I have a background in math and education and psychology, I teach… educational psychology! So anyways, I went out there with her and I remember on the way back, she had a lead foot! ... She got pulled over! The Pennsylvania State Trooper pulled her over! But she was like “Oh, I totally know, I know I was going too fast!” But she used to say that she liked that song Ain't Nothing Gonna Break My Stride. I don't know if you've heard, it’s from the eighties. That was her song! Nothing’s going to break her stride! Like I said, she had a lead foot. So I don’t know if we should take that part out. [laughing] That was fun. But I ended up going to U of M, University of Minnesota, and I ended up getting into a doctoral program, but I decided when I was there, I thought ‘you know what, let me get my masters first. I'm not quite sure.’ So I ended up getting my masters but then I thought, ‘you know what, there’s really not that much more. I have to do a dissertation’… so I ended up getting my doctoral degree from the University of Minnesota. Both of them, the masters and doctoral degrees were in educational psychology with a concentration, initially in statistics for my masters, and then in psychometrics for my doctoral degree. And then my minor supporting programs were all like child development, developmental psych, and family social science, and I worked over in maternal and child health in the public health arena. So I was involved in public health research… For a while I worked as an evaluator in a math project for mathematically talented kids. So anyway, my supporting program, it was pretty much a mix of all those kinds of things. That’s what I ended up doing!

Wright: Wow, very impressive! And what are you doing right now?

Titus: … Right now, I'm teaching. I teach at a community college. I’m teaching psychology. I teach introductory psychology which I love. And I teach human growth and development which is lifespan developmental psychology and I love that. And I- between graduate school and today- I actually was a research psychologist for a long time (19 years). I did research in substance abuse and mental health treatments, focused mainly on adolescents. But lots of other stuff too. My niches were translations, substance abuse and mental illness in the deaf community, and trauma/victimation. I was involved in translation projects. I really love the different cultural aspects of doing translations and so I worked with a lot of people from diverse cultures in translating instruments into different languages and trying to adapt treatments to accommodate different cultural groups in the United States. And so that was really fun. I liked that, I really did. But I had always wanted to go back to the classroom, that was a thing… I had always wanted to and so I kind of got tired of doing grant-funded research, and so anyway here I am now.

Wright: And did you think your Salve education prepared you for all this?

Titus: Oh my gosh, I'll tell you what I tell people all the time. I think the education I got at Salve was superior to what I got at Minnesota [laughs]! And I don’t know if it was because of the culture or what. But because it was a small place, there was a lot of hands-on work with your professors… I did create relationships with my professors at the University of Minnesota because we were a small department. Even so, I felt like there was a lot more… attention, like one-on -one [at Salve]. I mean, I was at Sister Madeleine’s office like every day. Sister Madeleine[[9]](#footnote-9) was in the math department, she was the head of the math department. Like I said, math was a challenge for me. I was a good student and I was [there] everyday if I had a question. And I was! And she could count on me sitting outside her door! So anyway, you got a lot of one-on-one and it was a very nurturing environment. And it's funny, when my son was getting ready… for college, I thought you know, it'd be great if you could go to a place where there's a nurturing environment because it's a big, big jump from high school to college. That transition is huge and… rather than a big place where you feel like you could be lost, … and he actually [is] a very different kid than I was. And he's fine. He’s at the University of Illinois. He’s totally fine there, he's in the music department. But anyway, Salve was nurturing, it was a nurturing environment and I needed that I think. Especially being a kid who was kind of… ‘I don’t know what I want to do,’ ‘I don’t know who I am,’ you know all that stuff. So, yeah, it was a good place to be.

Wright: Definitely, I couldn’t agree more. So that concludes all my questions but is there anything else you want to touch upon before we stop the recorder?

Titus: Let’s see. I don't know, are there any of the old teachers or administration, that I don't know, can you tell little anecdotes?

Wright: Yeah, please do! We love them!

Titus: Let’s see. Sister Lucille was wonderful. She was, she was the president and she was just… she had a math background. She was so supportive of me being in math. She had a very soft voice and everybody loved her. And then Sister Sheila, she was like a hot ticket. There was a girl in our class, the Class of ’84, who used to do really good impressions of her. And Sister Sheila loved her. She loved that she did that, she was spot on. And… Sister Sheila used to smoke and she went against our idea of [what it means to be] a sister- of a nun… But she was really something else! She was another one who was very supportive of me in my math journey and when I won that math department award, in junior year when she was giving me my plaque, we were out in the back of Ochre [near] the big lawn and we’d walk up on the porch… She whispered to me, ‘I think you should be a math teacher.’ And of course the [Newport] Daily News was there and they took this picture of a smile on my face, and… they caught my reaction… She kind of had her agenda for me. And who else was there?

Wright: Sister Therese?

Titus: Sister Therese was very business, very business… When I TA’d for her, that’s just the way it was… Sister Leona, she was another one who- she was the one who told me, you know, ‘you can't stay on this island. You need to get out and experience the world.’ Oh I was so sad when I heard she passed away. That wasn’t that long ago. But I had just seen her. I had just seen her and Sister Therese. We had been- my family- me, my husband, and my son had been in Newport, I think it was around Easter time. And we saw them at the little chapel and it was Sister Leona and Sister Therese. And they came up to me and… Sister Leona said, “I was saying to Therese, is that Janet?” It was so good to see them - they were always such good friends. You would always see them together. Then it was that year that we heard that she had passed away. And Sister Madeline, oh I loved Sister Madeline. She was probably gone by the time you got there.

Wright: I think so, yeah.

Titus: ... she was just an incredibly brilliant woman, seriously and [was] also very supportive. And then the psych department, of course we had Dr. Walsh, and he did most of the administrative stuff. And he taught too but he did a lot of the administrative stuff. And Dr. Frankel[[10]](#footnote-10) who is still there, which is amazing to me, and he was my advisor and I remember one of my friends had a crush on him, and kind of would like to hear things, like if I had to meet with him! And I had another friend who had a crush on Dr. Walsh. That was funny! And of course Dr. Salvatore[[11]](#footnote-11), who was kind of like everyone’s mom. And Father Malone.[[12]](#footnote-12) I never took a class with Father Malone. Oh and then we had this wonderful professor in the Spanish Department. He passed many years ago at this point… Dr. Vasquez.[[13]](#footnote-13) And he was great. He had a hearing loss and so he used to talk really loud. You’d hear him like all over the building, all over… he was so wonderful. He was from Cuba and he used to tell us stories about how he basically escaped from Cuba. And this was in like the thirties or something, and how I think he was trained as an attorney. And when he got out of Cuba, he was in Florida and he was working as like a bell boy but he was so thankful to be out of there. But yeah, he was he was just… he used to come into the chocolate store and I used to like to give them like little free samples. He and his wife [would come in]. So he used to call me “Janet de los chocolates,” “Janet of the chocolates,” so… really loud…

Wright: It definitely sounds like you had the best support system.

Titus: I really did! I really did. And I love going back there. I mean I really do! My husband's been there, my son, he's been there since he was a little kid. When I brought him there one time, he was three years old, and… we had lunch with Sister Madeleine… over [at] Wakehurst. They had like a little café in there or something. And we had lunch there. And after lunch, Jonathan, my son, three-years-old, said to me, “Mommy, why does Sister Madeleine have a towel on her head?” [laughter] A towel! I thought, now that is really cute. That is like a typical three year old. Very observant… but that was cute! So a lot of changes on campus since the time when I was there. I mean, it’s really expanded. The library used to be in… what’s the name?

Wright: McAuley.

Titus: McAuley! Yes, that was the library! I actually worked in there too for a while. I was working at the library [during the summer]. And that was fun actually. I always had this fantasy of sliding down the banister in McAuley. I always wanted to do it! I never did! And then [when] we went there for a reunion recently, a friend of mine was trying to get me to do it. I’m like ‘No! I’m a fifty-something year old woman, I am not going to slide down the bannister!’ It would be fun though, wouldn’t it?

Wright: One of these days!

Titus: But anyway, yeah! So what is that now, is that like an academic building? Do they teach classes in there?

Wright: Yeah, I’ve taken a couple classes [there]. I know there’s a couple departments in there too, like philosophy, and history, and education.

Titus: …There was this bathroom on the second floor, that I don't even know [if it’s] still there. It had this huge claw foot tub and I mean it was like, I don’t know… It was like a mansion bathroom! It was very impressive… I had friends who worked over in Ochre Court so they used to bring us over to places that weren’t open. Like we used to stop the elevator in the mezzanine level, or they brought us up to the attic one time. You know the big portrait that’s over… We were up there and you could see… there’s nothing that’s preventing people from falling through that… you have to be really careful but it was so cool to be up there and see, ‘oh my god, that’s where the big painting is! And the ceiling! And look at the little windows you can look out!’… so, yeah that was fun.

1. Dr. Anthony Walsh retired in 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sr. Sheila Megley, RSM was Provost until 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dennis Conner won the America’s Cup three times: 1980, 1987, and 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sr. Lucille McKillop, President from 1973-1994 (d. 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sr. Therese Antone, President from 1994-2009. Present-day Chancellor. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Born in West Germany, Dr. Jorn Zeuge joined Salve’s math department in 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sr. Leona Misto, Vice President of Mission Integration (d. 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Sr. Elizabeth McAuliffe, joined Salve’s Department of Education in 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Sister Madeleine Gregoire, DHS who taught Math at Salve for more than thirty years. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Dr. Arthur Frankel, a member of Salve’s Department of Psychology since 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Dr. Caroline Salvatore served as a member of the Psychology Department for nearly thirty years. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rev. Michael Malone, CSSP. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Dr. Heriberto Vasquez joined the Spanish Department in 1964. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)