

Myka Bailey: Welcome to I Am WT. I am your host, Myka Bailey.

Thomas Rodrigue...: And I'm your other host, Thomas Rodriguez. And we are joined today by Dr. Jessica Mallard, the dean of the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities.

Myka Bailey: So, will you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Certainly. I grew up mostly in Oklahoma City. My undergraduate degree is from the University of Central Oklahoma, so Edmond Oklahoma. And then after that, I knew I wanted to go to graduate school, so applied to 10 graduate schools. And my top two choices then were USC and Penn State. And I had a brother that lived in DC so I picked Penn State. Was there for my master's in PhD. And then one thing they don't tell you when you get a PhD is that there are more PhDs than there are jobs. They don't tell you until you've already done it. And so, then you just apply all these places and see where you end up. And I ended up in St. Joseph Missouri at Missouri Western State University. Was there for eight years until I was here at WT for 22 years.

Myka Bailey: Wow. You've been everywhere.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Yes.

Myka Bailey: So, that's pretty cool. How did you end up at WT?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: A really good question. So, I was a debater in high school and college, and met someone on my... I was with a group on the debate team. And one of the debaters, we went separate ways, just we're friends. And I ran into him without 13 years of contact because that was before Facebook, and cell phones, and all of that stuff. And we were at an event together, just hit it off and decided this could be a thing. And so, he'd been in his job eight years in Amarillo. I'd been in mine eight years in Missouri, and we just dated long distance and until we could figure out how one of us could move.

Myka Bailey: That's really sweet. I was also a debate kid.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Debate's good.

Thomas Rodrigue...: So, you picked WT. Why did you pick WT?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: My husband was an attorney here, and so that brought me here. It was really a similar size institution to where I was. I like this size. It's much different than when I was at Penn State teaching. There're just so many students. They have classes with 800 students and it's just a very different environment. Here, you really get to know your students.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, I think that's something I really like about WT as well is just you get the personal touch. Because all the colleges back home in the Houston area is like 40,000 students here, 80,000 students there. That's a little too big for my taste, I think.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Well, and if you think about it, things like doing a play production or even doing a podcast when you have that many students, you have less opportunities, because there's only so many of those opportunities. So, you really get to do stuff much earlier at WT.

Myka Bailey: Yeah, most definitely. We were actually just talking about this before you showed up that our community here is so tight-knit.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yep. I haven't seen a group of students more, I guess connected anywhere else than I have at WT. So, we've got a good thing going here. In serving as the dean of the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, what is your academic background? And what is one of the cool things about working in your position?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: So, my background is communication. And what was neat about being dean is I think that we stay in our own silos. I knew what was going on in communication. But as dean, I really have to support all the areas of the college. So, I got to know the music faculty and went to concerts. I got to know the art faculty and go to art exhibitions, go to speaking events. And really pushing me to do all those things has been a really great part of the job.

Myka Bailey: Yeah, that's great. Well, you've seen WT grow a little bit. Or I say grow. You've seen WT grow a little bit. Could you talk a little bit about how that has gone throughout the years?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: The campus is remarkably different than when I started in 2002. So, in 2002, you could drive in front of Old Main. That was a street, now we call it the pedestrian mall. And also the street leading up to it, you could drive on that. So, it was much more a feel of a commuter campus and not just a residential campus. We had fewer residence halls. Several of those have been built since I was here. So, it has a much more feel of a real university. And it's pretty. When I walk around campus, particularly this time of the year, it just makes me smile and it really feels like a great environment to be in.

Myka Bailey: Yeah.

Thomas Rodrigue...: So, what motivated you to become dean of the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: I'd never really thought about doing that. My son was seven when I became interim dean. And so, how that happened, why do you want to give up a faculty schedule where you get the summer off to work 12 months? And so, just with

my son being out in the summers, I hadn't really thought about it. But they needed a dean, and so they needed an interim dean for the year that they searched for a dean.

And so, Dr. James Hallmark, he's big in the A&M system now. He just asked me to be interim and they wanted an interim dean who didn't want to be dean. Because if the interim applies for the dean position and doesn't get it, sometimes that can cause bad feelings because it's like, "Well, I'm good enough to do it for a year, but not for full time." And then as I got into it, I really liked it more than I thought. I liked the problem solving. Every day is different. You never know what's going to come in your door or in your inbox. And they weren't really super excited with the dean candidates. And so, I ended up being bean without ever applying for it.

Myka Bailey: Wow. They said, "Here you go."

Thomas Rodrigue...: "Here, have a job." Awesome.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: And then 12 years later, I still love the job.

Myka Bailey: Good.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Cool.

Myka Bailey: So, how did you end up making the decision that you gave up those summers in a way?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: I talked to my husband, we thought about it a lot. And his question for me is, he said, "You're one of the few people I know who really loves their job. Is happy to get up and go to work in the morning." He goes, "Are you sure you want to be an administrator?" And I said, "I really do." And so, yeah, I love the team feeling of the job. It's not just me, a faculty member in my office. I have staff around and we're a team trying to make things better. And I really like that aspect of it.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I know making the jump to administration is a big step. It's something my dad has been considering forever since... he's actually a music teacher back home. He graduated from here. I think just before you became dean. So, unfortunately didn't get to have any time with him. But he's been trying to figure out forever now if he wants to do it. And he's just like, "Nah, I like teaching too much." He loves his job, so he's got a good time with that.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: And I've really felt that way, but then I was surprised how much I liked administration, where you're in a position where you can look at something and say, "We can do this better." And just being in a position and having resources, that's very satisfying to know that you made something better.

Myka Bailey: Yeah. Do you have a favorite memory from all of this?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: So, I was been thinking about that. And the things that make me smile that I think about are really competitive aspects. I am somewhat competitive, I guess. So, things that come to mind is helping out a new student orientation. And we used to do these skits where there would be faculty members working with new students. And there were games and someone got to win. And so, those were really fun. We used to also do communication week. And the professors would have some competition and they would dress up like different characters or there was always a theme to it. But when I look back on it, those things are really fun and make me smile.

Myka Bailey: Yeah, that's nice that you can do more than just office work and administration. You get to have all these other fun things that you can contribute to making the job fun and stuff like that.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: And I would also add that the thing that gives me satisfaction or purpose, is being able to help faculty or students be successful. And so, faculty, it's helping them get the resources that they need to go to conferences or to do the research they need to do. And students, every now and then a student just runs across a big obstacle, or they have something happen in their life and they need a little extra scholarship money to be able to stay here. And it's really satisfying to know that I have been able to help students continue their education.

Thomas Rodrigue...: You were talking about resources and all that, and it struck me just because I've been in the music program. I'm not a music major or anything, but I have played in the band before and I have a lot of friends who are in the band, and I know they talk about their big conferences, like TMEA and all that. And just you talking about getting resources for that, it reminded me of that because I mean, I don't think I've seen a single year where there hasn't been a music student that hasn't gone for either performance, or to learn something, or all that. So, it's super cool that you're able to get those resources out for those faculty and students to go and do those conferences.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Definitely. And another thing I would say that proud of, and it relates to this building. So, this building wasn't here when I started. So, it came online in 2006. But I really wanted to do something with the foyer in the fine arts complex. And so, being able to create the video wall, and then put the pub tables in there, and then finally brand all the areas of the college in that room, that space, it's really, that vision came to life and I'm really proud to have been part of that.

Thomas Rodrigue...: That video wall is super cool, by the way. It's awesome because we get to put our little advertisements for WTTV on those. So, it's fun to get to see those come up and all that.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Yeah, it really gave it character. It was really just an empty space with really short couches before we did that.

- Myka Bailey: And like Thomas was mentioning, it makes the students proud too because if your work gets up there, you feel really cool like. "Oh, that's mine."
- Thomas Rodrigue...: It's like, "Oh, I made that poster. That's super cool. That's awesome. I'm glad people are seeing that." I remember actually talking about it with some of my friends, I think it was last year. McFarland was working on some video projects and he had me model for them. And my face was all over the TVs for half a semester and they were like, "It's that guy." My friends in the music program were like, yeah, we keep seeing your face. And we pointed at every time we see it. And it's like, 'Oh, there's Thomas.'" And I'm just like, "Oh, yeah, that video that I'm in. I forgot about that." But yeah, it's super cool.
- Myka Bailey: If someone wanted to know more about what was happening inside the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, how would they go about that?
- Dr. Jessica Mal...: If anyone wants to know the things that are going on in our college, we have a weekly newsletter called Fine Arts Fanfare. And so, if anyone listening would like to get the weekly newsletter, reach out and we'll add you to it. But it shows all of the things that are happening every week. And so, right now we have a play production going. We had an art exhibition open in the gallery last night, the art gallery, and it's really cool.
- The art exhibition is with alum. And so, we had over 75 alum submit 125 pieces of art to be part of the show. So, really neat to bring alumni back to campus and see the great things that are happening here. It's toward the end of the semester. There's tons of music concerts going on. There's a dance concert at the end of April that last weekend in April. And so, one of the great things about the college is that we always have cool things going on. And also on the university calendar, you can look and see when our events are and where they are so that you know to plan ahead and see what you want to come see or hear.
- Thomas Rodrigue...: And if I'm not mistaken, I just know this because I have a friend who works on that newsletter because she works in your office. These podcasts episodes, they get announced on that newsletter. If I'm not mistaken, I remember a couple of our photos have gone out through that newsletter. So, that's super cool. It's just neat to see the lines get drawn between different orgs and all that kind of stuff, which is super fun. In a little bit, we will be talking a little bit more about what's happening in the Sybil, B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities right now. But we'll do that in just a moment.
- Myka Bailey: Before we dive more, we are going to take a really quick break and we'll be right back. So, stay tuned.
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Myka Bailey: Welcome back to I Am WT podcast. I'm Myka Bailey.

Thomas Rodrigue...: And I'm Thomas Rodriguez. And we are joined with Dr. Jessica Mallard.

Myka Bailey: We talked a lot about your background and your career. But what's some hobbies and some fun things you'd like to do on the side?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: I would say until I was dean, I was not creative. My mom would say organization was my creativity. I like office supplies and to have everything in its place. But recently, I've started making jewelry and then also making pottery. And so, I have a friend that got me into it and we create a bunch of stuff. We sell it at Christmas roundup. But I would say pottery is really relaxing. Other than that, love the outdoors, love reading. Those are my primary things I like to do.

Myka Bailey: I actually have one of your pottery. I was at the Christmas roundup and I have a... I think, yeah, it's a magnet and it's just a little heart in it, it's up on my fridge.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: It was super fun. And I'll be at Christmas roundup again in November.

Thomas Rodrigue...: The jewelry stuff made me think of my mom, because she used to actually have her own little on the side gig where she would make little jewelry, just some necklaces, and bracelets, and stuff. And actually I'm wearing one of her things, my little beads. But yeah, she's a theater teacher. So, I come from a family of fine arts people. My sister's in dance, my dad's a band director, my mom's a theater director. And she had the greatest name for her little jewelry store. It doesn't exist anymore, but she used to call it Drama Mama Jewelry.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: That's awesome.

Thomas Rodrigue...: She thought it was an awesome little name. She was super excited about it. Okay. So, let's talk a little bit more about what's happening in the college right now. Can you tell us a little bit about the art Subscription Series and other ways the community can engage with the college?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Certainly. We have something, it's beginning its 15th year in the fall called the Arts at WT: A Subscription Series. And what it is a way to highlight the great things we do in the college. And so, for a membership of \$300 a year for a couple, they get to go to all six events, have great food, great drinks, and interact with students as well as with the other patrons who are part of it. And we have one coming up on April 25th that's going to highlight the art that we do. In the early days of the Subscription Series, one of the most popular things was called Night Blow, where they're blowing glass with these kilns and furnaces.

We're bringing back some alum to do glassblowing for that. Blind Bird Designs, they're alum glassblowers who have their own studio at Sunset Center. And so, you can always see them on Friday nights. First Friday Art Walks is a fun way to

get to see them. But if anyone's interested in the Subscription Series, just reach out and we can get you the information and see what the season is. It includes the Christmas concert, it includes dance, it includes a lecture. So, lots of ways that we highlight the things that we do in the college.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I was hoping you would bring up the upcoming one because actually, last year when we helped out, when we provided music, we're going to do it again this year, and have a little mic and everything. But it was a super cool event. There was so much stuff that was just being shown off. And it was really fun to just be there in the area. Plus really good food. The food was so good. It was awesome.

Myka Bailey: I went back for seconds. I mean, yeah, I'm a sucker for food trucks though because oh, wow. Yes.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Were you guys there the end of the night when there was an-

Myka Bailey: The lockdown, yes.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: ... we had to shut the campus down?

Thomas Rodrigue...: We all went and we huddled in the radio station.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Yeah, I know. The food trucks didn't know what to do. They still had people's orders and they're ducking down behind their counters, and turned out to not be anything that we needed to worry about.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Once in a blue moon situation. Not happening again. No way.

Myka Bailey: I mean, are we the safest campus in... is it the United States?

Thomas Rodrigue...: In Texas. We're the 10th safest in the US, which is a crazy statistic to me. But I mean, that's super cool. Actually, that was one of the reasons I came here. I mean obviously a safe campus is important. But it's like, I don't know. It's like the smaller group. It feels, I don't know, safer, I guess. More homey I guess. I don't know. But I like it here a lot. How and why did the Subscription Series start in the first place?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Joe Bill Sherrod, who was our former development officer, came up with the idea. And he wanted to get people from outside Canyon to come to campus and see the great things that we do. And really, once people got on campus and saw the things that we did, the distance wasn't as far for them. It was not like, "Oh, I don't want to go to Canyon. But, "Wow, let's go to Canyon and see the great things that they're doing."

And so, what Joe Bill did find 25 couples and give them a free membership for the first year. They came, they saw the great things. And then they recommended friends the following year. So, it went from 25 couples to almost

175 couples. And so, really large group of people that get to see the great things that we do. And now when we have events, we say, "Bring a friend," and often those friends then join the following year. And so, we are doing amazing things here. Students are doing amazing things. And I think that when people see that, they see the quality of the things that have been done that they want to see it again.

Myka Bailey: So, what is one piece of advice that you would give students?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: So, graduating students or students in college?

Thomas Rodrigue...: We'll start with students in college and then let's move to graduating students.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: All right. I would say definitely get involved as you both are doing right now, and get involved early. They say the reason students are successful in stay in college is they make a connection. And I think students today, they've been in high school, they know all the same students. And then they come to college and they might not know anyone in a class. And it's difficult to figure out how do I form those relationships with people I don't know.

And so, really just reaching out, talking to those people around you, looking at what opportunities there are, student organizations, working with things that relate to your major as you all are doing. And so, I think just getting involved, making a connection. Dana and I did some research for a while that was talked about, social belonging. And that we had someone go into a classroom and they would say, "Raise your hand if you don't feel like you belong." They had people close their eyes. And almost everyone raised their hand. This was a primarily freshman class. And they felt like they were the only one that felt that way when really everyone felt that way. And so, just reaching out and making those connections so that you do get a sense that you belong at WT.

Myka Bailey: It's really hard because you have to think about, there's so many different personalities and so many different experiences. You have to figure out how to bring them all together. And I feel like WT does a great job with Buff Branding, and orientation, and all of those. At the same time though, it's always the student's decision in the end to get involved or not.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, I feel like every department has a way to get involved. And I know just from experience, because I did band my very first semester here, so I started with the summer band and everything. And that's where I really met my group of people who are still my people even today that they're like my tight-knit group of friends that I wouldn't have had if I didn't have the kind of community that WT offers. So, it's super cool. So, what about advice that you would give for graduating students?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Figure out what you want to do, which is a hard thing. You guys are getting close to that. But I think any type of experiences that you can have outside of the



classroom that help you figure out what you want to do or not do, are good. So, internships, I don't know if you all have done internships. But I know when I was in college, I thought I wanted to go into public relations. And so, I had a summer internship and hated it. I hated writing news releases. Which was a good thing to learn that I didn't want to do that. So, really doing those things that help you figure out where am I going to go? And even if the curriculum only requires one internship, I would say do as many as you can. Because that's the hard thing, figuring out what do I do next? The more experiences you have, the more you'll have a sense of where you want to go.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, I think internships is on our list of things that we have to do. I believe yours is coming up next semester, I'm not mistaken?

Myka Bailey: For the internship class?

Thomas Rodrigue...: Internship, yeah?

Myka Bailey: I'm actually taking it right now.

Thomas Rodrigue...: You're taking it right now?

Myka Bailey: Mm-hmm.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Where are you at internship?

Myka Bailey: Radio by Grace.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Radio by Grace?

Myka Bailey: Mm-hmm.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Oh, you've told me about this.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: So, what is that?

Myka Bailey: So, it's a radio station in Amarillo. And they are based out of a church. And they're a talk radio station. They have pastors on there that talk about preaching.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Yeah, very cool.

Thomas Rodrigue...: And you were talking about figuring out what you want to do. And I think that that is just really important, both for graduating students and students who are currently in our programs right now. Because I know that classes that I've taken, there are some classes that I'm like, "Yes, video production is super cool. I love this class." And there are classes where I'm like, "Advertising and public relations. Oh boy, this is so exciting." And I was like, "Oh, I don't want to take it."

But obviously you got to take the classes because WT really, I think focuses on giving us a diverse skillset. So, we know a little bit of everything. So, we are ready to go into that kind of work regardless of what we want and what we need. So, I think it's super cool that we get that set of work that we can do.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: An interesting statistic to graduates of fine arts and humanities, they might start lower than people who have a business degree or some of the other professions. But WT did a study of their graduates at five years, at the five-year mark. Fine arts and Humanities were up there competitive with really everyone except engineers. So, there are great jobs out there and lots of room to move up, and make the salary that you can live with.

Myka Bailey: Yeah, that's huge. And I feel like comparing engineers to fine arts is hard because I mean, engineers literally, they graduate and they go making a \$100,000. And I'm like, what? How?

Thomas Rodrigue...: Looking at my \$40,000 a year entry level position coming out of college. But I mean there's room for growth. That's the industry. That's what we're looking at.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: You have to do something you love. And I know I couldn't be an engineer. So, finding what is it I like and what is the job that makes me happy?

Thomas Rodrigue...: Engineering is way too much math. No, thank you.

Myka Bailey: Could never.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I keep writing things. Thank you. But you put a calculator and some math homework in front of my face, and I'll sit there and stare at it and go, "Ugh, no, please. I don't want to do that." Yeah. What is one of your favorite memories of your time here at WT?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: God, it's hard to just pick one. Before I was dean, I worked with Teen Leadership Amarillo and Canyon. And that was a really rewarding program in that I trained college students to facilitate high school students, and in terms of leadership and team building. And I just really got to know those students. And I'd say that was really some of my favorite times, because I had the students for a whole year instead of just a semester. And so, I would say those relationships with students were really cool. I still keep in touch with one who lives in San Antonio. When he's in town. He'll stay with us. Actually, he's in Austin now. But just I think the relationships with students is really rewarding.

Myka Bailey: So, earlier we were talking about you moving to Costa Rica. What are you doing that for?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: All right. Well, we have a house in Costa Rica. I have a niece that was from Telluride, Colorado. And she went for a wedding in Costa Rica, and just fell in love, and never came back. And we started going and visiting during spring

break and just fell in love with it. And so, my niece does property management there. So, if you need a vacation rental for a week, she does that. And she found this amazing piece of land that overlooks the ocean. And so, we have three families on, we call it the compound, but my niece and her husband. And then down below it's my husband and I, a guest room, and then his cousin who's five days older. And then also on the property we have horses, we have dogs, we have cats. And so, it's this great community of family that we really enjoy. So, it's a really special place.

Myka Bailey: I am jealous. I wish I could say that that would be my life.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Costa Rica beach house? That'd be awesome. So, can we assume that this Costa Rica house is part of your retirement?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Yes. So, my husband and I are both retiring May 31st. And we're young to retire. So, it's not a retire from everything, but go for six months and then figure out what we want to do when we grow up. What's that next thing we're going to do?

Thomas Rodrigue...: So, what are some of the things you're looking forward to in your retirement? You got any plans?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: I think spending more time hiking and walking, spending time at the beach. You just can't go wrong with that. And then finding that next thing I want to do. There's a gift shop there that would sell my pottery if I want to go that direction. There's lots of things we can do remotely, so we'll just see where it goes. I need to come back next year and tell you how it's gone.

Myka Bailey: Definitely. I would love to hear all about that.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Do we think it's time for the big question?

Myka Bailey: I think it is time for the big question.

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Uh-oh, the big question.

Myka Bailey: I'm actually really interested what your answer's going to be because of how you yourself have grown WT.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Do you want to ask it?

Myka Bailey: Yeah, sure.

Thomas Rodrigue...: All right. Go for it.

Myka Bailey: Okay. What does WT mean to you?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Good question. I would say when I think of WT, it's not my workplace. It's more my home. And that is comprised of students, of faculty, of friends, who I would say even family. That's one thing I think WT is for everyone that comes here, is you're really part of the WT family. It's not just a location, it's a feeling. It's a reason I tell students, you need to go visit different campuses before you figure out where you want to go, because one of them is going to be home. You'll walk on and say, "This is where I want to be. I could see myself being here." So, 22 years is a long time, and I've formed a lot of great friendships here. And I'll always have really great memories of WT.

Myka Bailey: That's amazing. That makes me happy, because WT is my home, too. I mean, seriously, I was writing a portfolio, I guess you could call it, article for my internship class, reflecting on WT and its time. And I was just sitting there crying because I was like, man, I have loved all these experiences, I've loved all these people. And I'm nervous for the next step because these past three years have been the best three years of my entire life.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I work in this office over here. So, I was sitting in this office a couple weeks ago planning out my schedule for next semester. And I was sitting there and I was looking, and I was thinking, man, I'm going to be a senior. I'm almost done. I am not ready to adjust to the working world yet. So, it's going to be a big step. But I think, I mean, that's part of the graduation process, is just it's a big step into what you're going to do next. So, I'm nervous, but excited, I would say.

Myka Bailey: Did you feel that way?

Dr. Jessica Mal...: Yes. So, I always knew I wanted to get my PhD. And so, I didn't really have much. I didn't question that very much. And loved graduate school much like this, graduate school is also awesome because you're really just taking the classes that you're super interested in. But I spent five years getting my master's and PhD to be a professor, but I didn't know, am I going to love it? Because I hadn't done it. You've taught some in graduate school. But stepped into the classroom, stepped into a campus, and just knew it was my thing. And so, I was fortunate that early on I found out what I wanted to do.

Myka Bailey: Thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate it. And thank you for listening to the I Am WT podcast. You can find more at [www.wtamu/podcast.com](http://www.wtamu/podcast.com). And always, go Buffs.