

Fiona Doyle Interview: Paula Fass and Christina Maslach, "Academic Pioneers: Women at Berkeley in the 1970s and 1980s." Interviews with Berkeley's pioneering women professors, Berkeley, CA. Conducted 2019-2023.

Christina Maslach:

Let's start with some of the basic demographics. Your name, where you were born, where you grew up, school. I mean, it's basically a quick summary before you get here to Berkeley.

Fiona Doyle:

Okay. So, my name is Fiona Doyle. I was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in the Northeast of England, almost on the Scottish border. And I was educated there and then I did my undergraduate work at Cambridge. I attended Girton College, which was the first college for the higher education of women in the United Kingdom. I did my undergraduate work there and then I went to Imperial College in London for my graduate work. I actually had no intention of doing graduate work, but I didn't have a job, and decided to do a master's degree, then at the end of the master's degree, I was enjoying what I was doing.

Fiona Doyle:

And, the only job that I had was in, I think it was the Congo. Oh, no. It was Zambia. But I was turned off by two things. One was that they said that women could never work underground. As you know, I'm in the mining sector. Women can't go, or couldn't go underground, but you couldn't get promoted if you hadn't worked underground. The other thing was that they sent me a list of, the cost of various commodities so that I could assess how far my salary would go. And I got to the bit that said, deodorant unavailable, soap unavailable. And I thought - the tropics, and these basic hygiene necessities aren't available. So, I decided to stay on and do a PhD, which I did. I'd actually never intended being an academic, but it was the same story that, the kind of, the only industrial jobs that I could get were ones that didn't require graduate work.

There were some that did require graduate work but weren't open to women. So, I can talk about that. Then basically, you know, I was kind of working at a job that was just bachelor's level entry. And so I'd been applying for a few academic jobs in the United States, largely because it was easier to get hired here without postdoc experience. And, I interviewed at the University of Idaho in Moscow and they turned me down. I discovered later that the chair of the search committee was the son-in-law of the advisor of the person that they actually hired. But, Berkeley was kind enough to give me a job, so I came here.

Christina Maslach:

Okay.

Fiona Doyle:

And I thought that I'd be here for a couple of years until the economy improved, when I would go onto my dream job in industry, but I fell in love with being an academic, and so I'm still here. That was in 1983.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. So these serendipitous kind of paths...

Fiona Doyle:

I always tell students that you should be following your gut and doing what you're interested in. And in addition, keep an open mind and don't try and micromanage your future because your future will not work out the way that you might plan it.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. You know, that's an interesting theme that sort of comes up with a number of people in different ways. That kind of thing. But I think you're right that you don't always know what may happen, or opportunities or things you never knew about or didn't try until you did.

Fiona Doyle:

I mean, as recently as my last academic review when I informed my department chair, as I was going up to above scale that I had a serious case of imposter syndrome. It was alive and kicking then, and I really did kind of say, well, I've got to get out of universities before they discover that I'm not clever.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. So, Idaho no, but Berkeley, yes. How did you find out about the job? What made you apply to Berkeley? That's a long way away. And how did the process go?

Fiona Doyle:

This was kind of a funny story in that, from the age of about 14, I always thought that it would be wonderful to live in the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay area. And...

Christina Maslach:

Really?

Fiona Doyle:

This is not a normal aspiration for somebody from Newcastle upon Tyne, as you can imagine. I had no idea how I was going to get there. But, when I was in probably the second year of my PhD program, there was an American student in one of the affiliated research groups who had done some studying here, and he mentioned that Berkeley was looking for an Assistant Professor in hydrometallurgy. And this conversation happened in the coffee room where we were all sort of hanging out, and there was a postdoc in the group who was looking for academic jobs and he said, well, Gary should apply for that job. And I remember saying, gosh, you know, if I were done, I'd be applying for that job in a heartbeat. And, the postdoc didn't want to leave England and wouldn't entertain the possibility of even applying for the job. And then about 18 months later, this student, Dennis was his name, I forget his last name, said, Oh, Berkeley didn't fill that job, it's still available.

Fiona Doyle:

And I said, "Oh, do you know who might be involved in this?" And of course, this was before the internet. You couldn't just Google something and get the information. And he gave me the name of one of my colleagues in the department. And so I wrote to him. You know at that point, one wrote longhand and everything else, and I said that I was coming to the end of my PhD work and was looking for a position and sent a copy of my resume. And Jim wrote back and said, there-there's a possibility of postdocs, or we expect to be able to announce an assistant professor position, which would be reauthorized, later in the year. And so I wrote back and expressed an interest in that and asked if he could let me know. I think he also mentioned that he was going to be chairing the search. And so he wrote back, and I applied for the position and, eventually they brought me out for an interview. And took their time and finally offered me a job just as I was finishing my PhD work.

Christina Maslach:

Wow, that's great. So brand new PhD, and you started here?

Fiona Doyle:

Actually, my appointment started and I was reminded of this just this morning, going back through my academic personnel records with the person at engineering on this. I was actually appointed the week before my PhD defense, so I was appointed as an acting assistant professor, and then they had to read my thesis and then finally approve me becoming a regular assistant professor. I mean, you talk about coming in at the bottom of the totem pole, it's like absolutely at the rock bottom.

Christina Maslach:

You know what's funny is a similar thing happened to me. I was finishing my dissertation, still doing data analysis and stuff, so didn't submit it in time for the May review, so it was withheld until the August review. But then my appointment started July 1st, so I had the same "acting assistant professor." And then they had to make sure I had truly completed my Ph.D.

Fiona Doyle:

Yes, no, my point. And my appointment started on April Fool's day, which was an auspicious day.

Christina Maslach:

1983, okay. So when did you come out and actually move?

Fiona Doyle:

So I moved out in May.

Christina Maslach:

Was there anything else about the hiring process that you went through, before you got the news that you had been hired, that struck you as particularly fun or interesting or weird? I mean, were they asking you things, anything particularly because you were a woman, or were you just being treated like a very sort of normal candidate?

Fiona Doyle:

You know, I think that it was different from the kind of processes in Britain. But then so much in the United States was different. And so it was very hard for me to, sort of think, Oh, this is because I'm a woman as opposed to, God they do things strangely in the United States.

I mean, I was clueless. You know, I've subsequently learned that people negotiate salary. They negotiate startup packages and even then, those startup packages were very different, but these things were open to negotiation even then. I had no idea. You know, I was, well, the salary that they offered me was, I think it was about three times higher than I was making in Britain. So that sounded good. And the start-up, I was just totally clueless. You know, I'm an experimentalist and I remember my start-up package was \$10,000. And certainly, in evaluating this, I knew what it cost to buy lab supplies and things in the UK, and I had a rude shock when I got here and discovered that things just cost a whole lot more here. So that \$10,000 didn't have the same purchasing power. They actually covered my moving expenses, but nobody bothered to tell me about that. And I was just finishing off a PhD program, so I was pretty penniless. And I got rid of pretty well everything to minimize the shipping costs of what I brought. And you know, afterwards I realized, Oh, I could have brought that if somebody had been kind enough to tell me that they would actually pay some moving costs. But I suppose I had low expectations in terms of how much help I was going to get, because I had not had help before, so it seemed fine to me.

And I think, you know, in talking with other female faculty, paradoxically I benefited from being in a unit that had no women on the faculty and in a college that had had almost none because we were such an unknown that people just didn't know what to expect. But I think that a lot of discrimination happens when people feel threatened. And I don't think anybody felt threatened because, you know, I was this sort of young, clueless kid. Sort of fresh off the boat so to speak. And engineering - Karl Pister was the Dean at the time and he was very, very strongly committed to diversifying the college. And so the orders that were coming down from above were very much along the lines of we need to bring in women and this is why. And you're going to treat them properly. So I think I had an easier time than many, even though being the only female faculty member in a department for 19 years sounds grim.

Christina Maslach:

Wow, it was 19 years? What was the department?

Fiona Doyle:

It started off as Materials Science and Mineral Engineering, and that was for the first 17 years. Then the department changed names in 2000 when they closed down the mineral engineering programs and then became Materials Science and Engineering. And I was the chair of the department before another woman was hired.

Christina Maslach:

Really?

Fiona Doyle:

Really, yes.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. At some point you came up for tenure. How did that go?

Fiona Doyle:

I didn't know that I was up for tenure...

Christina Maslach:

Oh you didn't? Nobody mentioned anything?

Fiona Doyle:

So my life has been completely this story of unexpected twists, including tenure. So, it was my fourth year at Berkeley, I had my mid-career appraisal. And you know, this came back very positively, and it said that I should be considered for tenure in one or two years and after a year, it had come to the end of the year. I went to the department chair who by that time was Jim Evans, the guy who had hired me and so on.

And he was a personal friend and so I could have a sort of forthright conversation with him and I said, "Okay Jim, so you know, the mid-career appraisal said that I should be reviewed for tenure in one or two years, so do you think it should be this year or should I wait until next year?" And he said, "Well, why don't you put together a couple of updates on what you submitted last year, and maybe a write-up on what you've done in the last year or so, and I'll have a couple of colleagues take a look at it and then we'll let you know whether or not you should be going up for tenure this time."

Christina Maslach:

Right.

Fiona Doyle:

And the next thing I knew, he was in my office congratulating me on a unanimous vote of my colleagues for forwarding me for tenure. So it was very painless.

Christina Maslach:

Oh my gosh, that's amazing.

Fiona Doyle:

I mean in this day and age, it couldn't happen because now everybody has to review documents and sign off on something, but it was all done under the cloak of secrecy in those days.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. Well, he certainly moved fast on that one, and to have it all done so he didn't have to say, okay, the meeting is going to be in two months.

Fiona Doyle:

I was totally clueless. I didn't know.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. So what year was that then?

Fiona Doyle:

So I got tenure in '88. So, yeah, I was only five years as an Assistant Professor. I think when I had the conversation with him, I said I don't like being the second-class citizen, so if you think that I could go this year, then I'd like to. But you know, considering that I'd come in as an Acting Assistant Professor Step One, that wasn't bad.

Christina Maslach:

Oh my gosh. Wow. Interesting story. Not, not everybody has that kind of experience, Fiona, you should know. Obviously, the thing went through, and you had officially gotten tenure, but did that change how you felt about the kind of work you were doing or the opportunities you now felt you could take on? Because you're not thinking, I have to pass this hurdle, I'm beyond it now.

Fiona Doyle:

Well, it didn't really, because one of the things that I realized? Well, so two things. One was, you know, when I finally got tenure and the nice little letter and everything else, I remember walking into work thinking, hmm, so I have a job for life. Do I want to come into the Hearst Mining Building every day? You know, to work there for the rest of my life. And I wasn't really sure that was quite what I wanted, which was, in a way, prescient because in the 1990s we were decanted from Hearst Mining Building when they renovated it. So, we were out for quite a few years. And then, one of the reasons why I have enjoyed my various administrative positions is that I really did not want to just be in my department. I sought out the Senate very early, I chaired my first Senate committee when I was an associate professor. And one of the

reasons why I did enjoy the Senate work so much was that it got me out of the department and exposed me to scholars in different areas. And actually there were some women there.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah I know.

Fiona Doyle:
I realized that once you get tenure, then the next hurdle is full professor, and then it's x and so on, and it kind of doesn't go away. There's always another step. Until you decide to retire. Which is quite a liberation.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. But it's not quite the same -- go up or go away kind of thing -- you know? if you're not getting full professor at first, you're just going to keep slugging away, you could take longer and then try again. So I think that's where people really talk more about the anxiety about the tenure, worrying that it might not go through at all.

Fiona Doyle:
Yeah. I had a relatively painless experience with tenure, and you know, I do deserve some of the credit for this. When I look back at my career, I think one of the things that has really helped me is that I am the third of five children. And so from a very early age, I had to get along with other people, and saw ways to build bridges between different people to try and keep the peace. And I knew how to work in an organization without making waves. You know, my oldest sister is perfect. And then the next sister was the typical second child who was very confrontational, and so on. And I could see I didn't want either of these paths. So I knew how to work with even my most senior colleagues, even the difficult ones.

Christina Maslach:
Wow.

Fiona Doyle:
At a very junior stage, my senior colleagues would send me to go talk to Gareth Thomas, or go talk to Doug Fuerstenau about this thing, because they're going to go ballistic if it's mentioned in a faculty meeting. And I was able to just have the conversation and get some input from them and so on. So I did learn how to work with people, and introduce new ideas.

Christina Maslach:
That is impressive. I mean I know they talk about soft skills, but that enables you to do so much.

Fiona Doyle:
It makes it a whole lot easier. At the same time that I was being voted on for tenure, there was a colleague who had joined the university two years before me, and he'd been turned down for tenure the year before. He was on his seventh year, and he was a difficult individual who rubbed people the wrong way, and so on. I think a lot of the discussion was about him, and it's like, "Oh yeah, Fiona's fine. We'll keep her."

Christina Maslach:

I don't have to worry about her. Okay.

But you mentioned administration. I agree with you 100% about Senate work because I resonate to what you were saying about the first time you get involved in some other activity that had other people from other parts of the campus. It's like all kinds of windows and doors opening.

Fiona Doyle:

And isn't it interesting?

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Fiona Doyle:

I've always been so interested in how the university functions as a system. You know, as I've gone on, I've realized that I was ascribing all sorts of intelligences to this organization that it didn't have at that point. And on some of those things, I've actually been able to have some influence. I had assumed that there was some system that matched the number of seats in classes to the demand, which there wasn't and it still needs improvement, but at least we've made progress there.

Christina Maslach:

Good point, yeah.

Fiona Doyle:

No, I, I've just found it very interesting on an intellectual level to understand how the university works.

Christina Maslach:

Were you also moving on an administrative path at that time in engineering?

Fiona Doyle:

Well, I actually just saw these records today, which is a bit of a coincidence. In the fall of 1990, I did a semester, acting as the Associate Dean in engineering for diversity projects, because Frank Morrison (who was the department chair when I was hired) was then the Associate Dean and he was going on sabbatical. So he asked me if I would fill in for him, which I did. And then, I had my daughter at the very end of '91, and at that point I was chairing a Senate committee (on courses of instruction), and I actually had to give that up because I had difficult pregnancies with both of my kids and I had to go on bedrest. And then I was gone on sabbatical because I had asked about maternity leave and was told that there wasn't such a thing for faculty. So, I took a sabbatical and stayed.

Christina Maslach:

Yes, I did the same thing.

Fiona Doyle:

And then when Katherine was nine months old, the university produced this little booklet on the faculty guide for working parents or whatever. And I saw that there was actually maternity leave in there, which was news to me. And nobody in engineering had apparently ever asked a question about maternity leave.

So, my career was sort of on maintenance in the mid-nineties. And then I had my son at the beginning of '94. So, you know, I had a couple of small children and various people mentioned that I would be a good department chair, and I knew that at some point I would have to be a department chair. And in 2000 to 2001, I was the Acting Director for the Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, which was one of the ORUs. And I actually was successfully ratified as the permanent director after a search. But then, the person who was our department chair stepped down, and the person who was supposed to take over left. I went on vacation for the last week in June and the first week in July. And at that point, this guy, Tim Sands (he's now the president at West Virginia Tech), was looking at a job in Purdue, but basically said, no, I think I'm going to stay, and he was going to be the next department chair. I came back from vacation after the first week in July and heard that actually he had decided to go to Purdue. I remember having a conversation with colleagues in the Xerox room, when they said, Oh yeah, today Tim's decided to leave. And I said, oh, I wonder who's going to be the next department chair. And then I went into a whole morning of meetings with my grad students. You know, it's sort of one on one, one after another to catch up on their progress. And I didn't get through that, because I got an urgent call from the Dean's office, and I went over and Rich Newton told me that I was the next department chair..

Christina Maslach:

Okay – “Thought we would let you know!”

Fiona Doyle:

At that point, I was the incoming chair of AEPE and, you know, my kids were still quite young, and so on. And I just called up Cathy Koshland, who was the Senate chair then, and I said, I cannot do this. I cannot just suddenly take over. I'm chairing my department as we are moving back into Hearst Mining Building, and chair of a Senate committee and a mother to two small children. And she was kind enough and I said, I'm happy to continue for a year on the committee and, and provide some support and leadership to whoever agrees to chair this, but I just don't have the time to be chair.

Christina Maslach:

You've mentioned your kids, your husband, and various points, so could you say a little bit more about your family life? I mean, just bits and pieces here, you know? So when did you meet your husband and get married and start a family?

Fiona Doyle:

So I was married when I came here, but that husband left me.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, okay. Number one. Never mind.

Fiona Doyle:

And then Steve and I got married in 1990. That's how I know exactly when I was doing that time as an acting Associate Dean because it was just after I got married. You know how there are little milestones associated with things in your lives. Steve worked as a geophysicist at Lawrence Livermore. And he was living out in Livermore. When we got married, he moved into the house that I had in Oakland, and he didn't think he was going to like living in the city. And we'd agreed that we'd go and live in Pleasanton or somewhere. And I like hot weather. I thought that was something lovely, but after six months, he fell in love with living in Oakland and said, I want to stay here. We're still in this house that I bought as a fixer upper and to sell in like five years. And I've been there for 31 years now.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, okay. That's funny. Oh my God.

Fiona Doyle:

And in fact, now that I'm retired, I can go back and sort of pick up the projects that I didn't tend to, like 25 years later before life overtook us. I literally met for the first time with an interior designer on Friday, and I've got another meeting this Friday to really talk about, well what do we do here, there, and everywhere. And on Monday, I went to, and I'm fairly handy, you know, I'm an experimentalist.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Fiona Doyle:

And so there's a ceiling in the office that I needed to repair. And then there were some cracks above our front door that I needed to fill. I came to do that, above the front door, and poked on one of the cracks and realized that the paint was loose. And before I knew it, I'd taken all the plaster off above the door. It was this large area that's bald. And so, part of the part of this week's project is filling that in. I'll do priming tomorrow.

Christina Maslach:

I love it.

Fiona Doyle:

And then I'll paint it, sort of, probably later tomorrow. So, by the time the interior decorator comes again on Friday, she'll have no idea what happened.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, so you're getting, oh my gosh. You're getting back to that. So then, okay, so you got married but then you started having children.

Fiona Doyle:

So we got married in '90. And so, my daughter was born on Christmas Eve in '91. And then my son was, it was basically two years and three weeks later my son was born. You know, at that point I wasn't a spring chicken and so didn't want to delay having children too long.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. I understand that.

Fiona Doyle:

And definitely it was very hard juggling all of that.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Because you mentioned, earlier, about how you were being asked to do so much stuff at that time and young kids....

Fiona Doyle:

Yeah. But one of the advantages of being department Chair when your children are small, is that no matter how horribly your children are behaving, it's always better than your worst colleague. So you're looking at children with appreciation, I think, isn't it nice? They could be behaving so much worse.

I said no to a lot of things, and one of the challenges that we had is that both Steve and I, our parents were considerably older and also lived a long way away. You know, my parents were in Britain, and Steve's parents were in Central Michigan, and so we didn't have family close by to step in and pick up the kids and so on. Fortunately, one of the reasons why I'm still in the house (that I bought just after I got tenure actually), is that it was a three bedroom, two bath house. And by the time my son came along we realized that we needed more space, but we had these wonderful next-door neighbors who moved in shortly before my daughter was born. And they have two boys who are the same age as our children. And they were also a long way from home, so we were each other's backup.

Christina Maslach:

Wow.

Fiona Doyle:

We shared a nanny, then the kids went to the same preschool. We used to take turns to do the pickup. When the kids got chicken pox, Pat and I split the time looking after two sick kids. Of course, the older ones got chicken pox first and then just as they were getting ready to go back to the daycare, the younger ones got chicken pox, and so on. But when you have neighbors like that, it's absolutely idiotic to move away. And so we just put an extension on the house.

Christina Maslach:

That sounds like gold.

Fiona Doyle:

It truly is like gold. I mean, my life would have been very, very different without these two angels next door. And so yes, I was just unbelievably lucky to end up in that situation.

Christina Maslach:

That is so great. I love that story. Over the years, I've heard from other people whose community had a lot of that kind of thing. You could always count on the fact that one of the neighbors would be around, and we look out for each other and we're there for each other. And just to have that, I think is fabulous.

Fiona Doyle:

There was a wonderful, older African American woman who lived across the street from us. She passed away a few years ago. She was a year younger than my father, so she would have been coming up for 98 now. And she was one of the affluent African American Oakland community, you know, one of her nephews had been the mayor and so on. And when my son was in first grade or something like that, they had to interview a neighbor about something or other, and, you know, it's an older person. And we suggested, why don't you go and ask Mary if she would be interviewed? I'm sure she'd love to tell you about what Oakland used to be like. And Ian and Steve went over there, and she told them about segregated swimming pools and about the opportunities that she had as an African American woman. It was very enlightening for everybody. But Mary used to sit in her front window and watch everything that was going on in the neighborhood. She'd say, "Oh yes, I'm just your nosy neighbor across the street." It was fabulous because -- nothing missed Mary. If any of the kids got out on the street or whatever, she'd have been on the phone, or actually she would've run across the road, and taken them inside.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. That is really cool. So now your children are where? Are they in Berkeley still, or?

Fiona Doyle:

My daughter lives in Mill Valley, and my son's back at home. He's one of the classic boomerang millennials. He might have got up now. He's between jobs as well. He was supposed to be looking for a job. But actually, that's nice because the last couple of years he was in high school, he was very difficult, and it was quite tense. We didn't have any empty nest anxiety because we were just anxious to get Ian out of the house. So, it's nice to have him back again. And sort of as a reasonable human being.

Christina Maslach:

Oh my gosh. That's such a neat story. And the different stories we hear about family and children are amazing, including decisions that some of the women have made about how many children, or whether they would have them, or whether they would adopt – the opportunities or challenges that were presented to them and how they dealt with it. And the stories have a unique quality. There are some larger issues we were all dealing with but lots of different possibilities, lots of different paths.

Fiona Doyle:

Yeah. I might have had more, but as I mentioned, I had difficult pregnancies, and with both of them there was a very real risk of preterm labor. And that's something that doesn't go away. We didn't want to have a preemie who has all sorts of health problems, especially if you've got another couple of kids who are depending on you. So it seemed smart to stop at two.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, I did too. And when I look back at prior family generations, like my husband's families, all of whom were having at least 10 children -- I cannot begin to imagine what that would be like.

Fiona Doyle:

Well, my mother wanted, she said, from being a small child, she wanted 8 children. But shortly after my youngest brother was born and my mother was 39 at the time, she had a thrombosis that was nearly fatal. And they told her that she needed to stop at five. But you know, I was raised in, it was the North of England, but it was essentially an Irish Catholic community. And so our family with five was probably on the lower end of the spectrum. I remember the whole class being surprised when Michael O'Shea in fourth grade said that he had 16 brothers and sisters.

Christina Maslach:

16. Oh my God. Wow. And I always think of the mom, you know? Not just that you have brothers and sisters, but your mother. Wow. That's incredible.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. So one kind of category that we really haven't gotten to is teaching. Is there anything you want to talk about in terms of the kind of load teaching load you had, the kind of choice, what it was like working with undergraduates, graduates?

Fiona Doyle:

So teaching was an interesting story. And teaching was probably one of the areas where I was least supported and I don't think it was because I was a woman. But at that time, when I first started my career, the department assigned GSI assistance to faculty largely based on seniority, and who kicked up most of the storm, rather than enrollments. So I found myself teaching classes of 50 without any assistance at all. When, you know, colleagues who were teaching a little graduate class of a dozen students had a GSI. Probably called TAs in those days. So men who were at my level had a similar experience. It wasn't because it was a woman, it was just the way things were.

Christina Maslach:

You're lower on the totem pole.

Fiona Doyle:

Very much so. And you know, I came to Berkeley, I was hired to teach hydrometallurgy, to be a hydrometallurgy specialist, and I came excited to start teaching in my area. But I was told in no

uncertain terms that the first thing that I had to teach was corrosion. And when I was interviewed, I was asked whether I would feel comfortable teaching corrosion. Because I wanted the job, I said yes, rationalizing that it's just sort of electrometallurgy backwards, I can do it. And what they did not tell me was that the faculty member who was the corrosion specialist had died of a heart attack in his office a few months before I was interviewed. Several majors in the College of Engineering at that point required students to have taken the course in corrosion, as part of their BS requirements. And so by the time I got to Berkeley, there were all these students who desperately needed a corrosion class in order to graduate. So I got stuck teaching undergraduate corrosion, which was just a huge amount of work because it wasn't my area.

Christina Maslach:

Wow.

Fiona Doyle:

And I have never really been a sort of a dynamic lecturer as such. You know, my favorite part of teaching is more small groups or office hours and things like that. So, it was a bit of a challenge, you know, putting things together. But the biggest challenge of all was completely not understanding the academic preparation that American undergraduates had had. Because I'd gone through the British system, where you took O levels at 15 and 16, and then for the last two years in high school, you specialized for A levels. And then, one's undergraduate is highly focused. So, you know, the last writing class that I took was when I was 16. I just wasn't taught anything like that. And so, when I look back, what I did for A levels in physics and chemistry were more along the lines of what people will do at the lower division at Berkeley. And so, I expected my students to have a lot of knowledge about chemistry, particularly chemistry, but also physics -- but they did not have it. And so, it took a few end-of-semester evaluations, and talks with students one on one, to get a better idea of what they knew and where they were coming from. I think it really clicked for me once my kids had gone through high school, and I saw what they were doing -- oh, that's why my students didn't understand, or things like that that I thought everybody knows.

Christina Maslach:

Right.

Fiona Doyle:

And I clearly remember once I was teaching mineral processing, an undergraduate class at one point, and I'd battled through comminution, which is all about how you crush and grind rocks and things like this, and it's not my thing. And so on. And we finally got to flotation, which is where you've got chemical interactions between reagents and mineral surfaces. Finally, I know what I'm talking about. I could relax, and I went into class and had my notes and everything else and started writing on the board, and the reagents are mostly organic chemicals and I was happily writing these on the board, and I looked around and there was this sea of blank faces, and Susan Sherlock in the front row raised her hand and said, "Professor Doyle, that looks like, I think it's organic chemistry and none of us have had any organic chemistry." So, it was a calibration of what my students knew that took quite a bit of getting used to.

Christina Maslach:

Right, Wow. That is a challenge. And because students aren't as brave always as the person who in that first row would say that -- they're thinking, I should know this and how come I don't?

Fiona Doyle:

While I was writing on the board, they were obviously whispering among themselves. And I knew these students well, I'd taken them on field trips and things. And so, it wasn't like I was some alien or, you know, demigod, or something.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. That's an interesting problem.

Fiona Doyle:

Yeah. But what I've always enjoyed most about teaching, I think, is getting to know students and seeing them blossom. It's so magical.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, that's a nice way of putting it. It's thrilling, especially when you've seen some of them really struggle and not really know where they're going, or what they're doing, or what excites them. And then there's at some point it's like a little switch goes on -- like, yes! Blossom is a good way of putting that. I like that. That's a nice word.

Fiona Doyle:

You know, I've had research ideas that basically came to me in trying to reconcile questions from students with my understanding of material and basically realizing, I don't think anybody does understand this. Now, this would be a good thing to look into. And I've had the unbelievably gratifying experience of, on many occasions, students coming and asking me about something and saying that these ideas were spawned by what I had taught them. And I said, I have talked about this? And they'd say, yeah you did, oh yes. I never saw the connection with where they took these ideas but seeing how something that you say can then influence another person's thinking in such a creative direction is unbelievably powerful.

Christina Maslach:

Oh yeah. Also gold in a different way.

Fiona Doyle:

Yeah.

Christina Maslach:

Anything else about teaching? Some of the people I've interviewed have talked about instances where being a woman was a challenging thing for them.

Fiona Doyle:

It was a challenging thing for me. Particularly when I was starting my career, the expectation from students was sort of an alpha male in front of the classroom. And I'm not an alpha male.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Did it affect your evaluations?

Fiona Doyle:

I think that it did. And I've noticed because I did a lot of academic personnel cases for the College of Engineering. By the time I was evaluating other people's teaching records, I could predict pretty well which of my female colleagues were going to get good evaluations, and which of them weren't. And a lot of it had to do with forceful personalities, and confidence in speaking. Students don't like somebody who says, "well, you know, that that isn't necessarily known." I remember one of my colleagues saying, Students actually like class to be like a gospel revival.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. This is the way. And it shall be.

Fiona Doyle:

Well, yes. You know, God came down and said, let there be dislocations.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. I think it factors in with what some people also said is that the style then conveys that if you're a woman, you're not as good, you're not as smart -- they're getting the second class teacher, and so forth/

Fiona Doyle:

Well in my day, it was "okay, this is the affirmative action hire."

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. I know also when I've talked to women who are also of an ethnic minority, they say there's sometimes very blunt feedback, which says you're not as good as the Sage on the Stage.

Fiona Doyle:

In that regard, I have probably been heavily advantaged by having a British accent, because, even though I am an immigrant and I don't talk like everybody else, just by accident of birth, I have an accent that is sort of typically perceived as reflecting education, rather than anything else, which is quite an odd situation for a first generation college graduate to find herself in.

Christina Maslach:

That's an excellent point because I think somebody in linguistics was talking about the stereotypes about a British accent versus a Chinese accent, where it has nothing to do really with education.

Fiona Doyle:
Or what they know, or whether they're talking sense.

Christina Maslach:
So I can imagine that. Especially for people for whom English is not not their first language, but who have to deal with stereotypes that come hanging off of them when they go into the classroom.

Fiona Doyle:
Yes. Yeah.

Christina Maslach:
Okay. I have not interviewed anybody else with a British accent, so this is a first, a first. Okay. Yay. And with that, I think we're done, so thank you.

Fiona Doyle:
Oh, thank you.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah, this has been a great interview.

END.