



## Karim Hamdy Oral History Interview, October 10, 2014

### Title

“The Persistent Arab’: Working to Broaden Horizons at OSU”

### Date

October 10, 2014

### Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

### Summary

In the interview, Hamdy recounts his upbringing in humble circumstances, stories of Tunisian independence, and changes in the culture of Tunisia that came about as a result of independence. From there he notes his family's strong emphasis on education and his own success in school, before turning his attention to his college experience at Université de Tunis.

As he recalls his undergraduate and graduate years at Tunis, Hamdy remarks on his adjustment to both a city and a collegiate environment, his contributions to forming a student government, the progression of his engineering studies, and the differences that he observed between the Tunisian and the U.S. systems of higher education.

Hamdy's professional career is the next subject of the interview, and in this he discusses his private sector work for a Danish firm, his early travel outside of Tunisia - including a trip to the U.S.S.R. - and the development of his interest in languages.

A major focus of the session is Hamdy's experience of living and working in the United States. He describes his decision to move to Oregon to pursue a Ph.D., the relatively large Tunisian community that existed then at OSU, and his own efforts in helping to form multiple North African student groups on campus. He notes the progression of his doctoral studies and recounts the ways in which his interests shifted from engineering to languages. He also speaks of important OSU colleagues - including Laura Rice, who would become his wife - as well as the student activist community during the 1980s, his sense of Muslim religious culture in Corvallis, and his research in linguistics while a student at Oregon State. The interview then shifts to Hamdy's return to Tunisia for a home stay period, which included three months studying in France, a variety of jobs, and his marriage to Laura Rice.

The session rounds out with Hamdy's thoughts on his activities since returning to Corvallis in 1995. He discusses his efforts to increase computer literacy among Tunisians, his teaching of Arabic and French at OSU, and his co-founding of the university's Tunisia Study Abroad program in 2002. In reflecting on the program, Hamdy notes the impact of geopolitics on its development and recalls a few standout memories from its history. The interview concludes with Hamdy's thoughts on the environment faced today by international students at OSU, his work with INTO-OSU, and his sense of OSU's current direction, including a need to boost support for the humanities.

### Interviewee

Karim Hamdy

### Interviewer

Chris Petersen

**Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/hamdy/>

## Transcript

**Chris Petersen:** All right, Karim, if you could please introduce yourself with your name and today's date, and our location?

**Karim Hamdy:** My name is Karim Hamdy. We are at the OSU Library, and it's October 10th, 2014.

**CP:** Yes. So we'll be talking a lot about your—as we mentioned off camera—long and diverse association with OSU, but I want to start at the beginning in Tunisia, where you were born. So, what city were you born in?

**KH:** I was born in a city by the name of Gabès, located on the coast in the southern part of the country.

**CP:** Is that where you were raised?

**KH:** Yes, I grew up there, and at age eighteen I finished high school there.

**CP:** Tell me about your upbringing in Tunisia. You were brought up in very much a climate of change in the history of that country.

**KH:** I was born four years before the French left, so that can tell about my age. 1956 was the date of independence of Tunisia. I was born in a cave—many people don't believe this, but I was born in a cave. My mom and dad confirmed that to me, in an oasis which is a suburb of the city of Gabès. And by age six I started school, and back in Tunisia at that time we did Arabic, 100 percent, for three years, and then by age nine, I added French. By age twelve I started learning English, as well.

**CP:** Born in a cave?

**KH:** Yes, and I took my American students, OSU students, during study abroad, I showed them the place to confirm that, yes, indeed, I was born in a cave.

**CP:** What's the story there?

**KH:** It's just a shelter. Poor people—my family was very poor, and they needed lodging, and they found the flank side of a hill. My grandparents, I think, worked on it. They dug a hole into the side of the hill near the stream, near the river, and they added a hut and a courtyard. And it became home until we were chased away, or expelled, by flood, flash flood in 1959, and we became refugees for about four or five months. And my dad and mom built another hut, and thank God, today we are doing better.

**CP:** So you were, your family was impoverished?

**KH:** We were peasants. We had a little piece of farmland, part of the oasis, just really less than even half an acre, and we had subsistence living and farming. We lived with the seasons, whatever fruit was available. And the main fruit were dates and pomegranates.

**CP:** So did both of your parents come from this similar sort of background, subsistence farming?

**KH:** Oh, yeah, both my mom and dad, passed away a long time ago, are peasants. They were peasants, yes.

**CP:** Well, you mentioned that Tunisia became independent when you were four years old. Were there stories about this passed down, or do you have a recollection? Although I don't suppose, but?

**KH:** On day one of my life I don't have a recollection of what happened, but my mom and dad confirmed to me that there was a bullet by the French that landed on the side of our fence, around the hut and the cave the night of my birth, which means at that time it was an unstable situation of resistance by the Tunisians, but at the same time negotiations between the leadership of the National Movement and the French. And eventually there was very little violence. The founding

father of Tunisia, Bourguiba, was a very smart man, educated in Paris, and he found a solution without much violence, and the French accepted independence. So, that's the story I heard from my parents, the bullet the night of my birth.

**CP:** Did religion play a large role in your upbringing?

**KH:** Actually, not much. My mom and dad were illiterate, as were the majority of Tunisians, which goes to show that 75 years of colonization by the French did not help the Tunisians much. Illiteracy was very high. So religion was not part of our daily rituals until later on, and actually it hasn't been part of my daily life, ever. And I am Muslim by background, but not practicing.

**CP:** But that is, in Tunisia most folks are Muslim, right?

**KH:** Yes, we are. Actually Tunisia is about 99-point-something percent Muslim, and we have a few thousand fellow citizens who are Jewish, and there are perhaps ten, twenty thousand Christians, and maybe a few others.

**CP:** So, Tunisia became an independent country when you were four years old, and it began establishing itself as a political entity on its own. [0:05:01] Presumably that was a rocky transition, or am I wrong about that?

**KH:** I think there is some truth in that. Every transition has its problems, and in the case of Tunisia, thanks to the charismatic leadership of Bourguiba I mentioned earlier, he was able to stabilize the country very quickly. And there are a few peculiar features of the transition from colonization to independent nation-state. Bourguiba got independence for Tunisia with his, of course, fellow members of the National Movement, March 20th, 1956. Before they worked on any other thing, within four months they instituted the Tunisian Equal Rights Amendment, for equality between men and women. August 13th, 1956, many, many years ago—perhaps all Tunisians are proud of that, and they remember it very well. Every summer now, every August 13th, they celebrate Women's Day, and as I said, it came about before the Constitution, which took three other, more years, for it to be approved, drafted and approved. And Tunisians, as I said, are extremely proud of what they call CSP, which is Code du Statut Personnel, the equivalent of ERA. And they at the time abolished, for example, polygamy, instituted a number of rules and regulations for equality between men and women, in marriage and outside marriage.

**CP:** Did this culture of change manifest itself in your upbringing, at all? Did it make an impact on you? Did you realize that things were changing so dramatically, or was it you were just living your life as a boy?

**KH:** I think as a young boy, one is not aware of the changes, except that when a girl sat next to me in grade school, it was no big deal. I think it may have been a big deal in the minds of the parents, perhaps, because between like '55 and '56 there was a change. Although, I imagine—I believe we had girls' schools, boys' schools, during French colonization, which is a little odd, because the French Revolution, with its rights of man, and forward-looking about equality of men and women, we had more boys' and girls' school during colonization than after that. And it was to us, as little children going to school, it was no big deal, and people—soon after that we started having women teachers. There weren't many during French colonization. And soon after that, we had women included in all walks of life; still it is the same today.

**CP:** Did your mom ever talk about these changes with you?

**KH:** My mom was a stay-at-home mom taking care of the family, and as I said earlier, she was not educated, although she was very wise; frugal, wise. And her wisdom actually sustained all of us, because my father, whom I consider was also very wise, but he was gone, trying to make a living to take care of a family of six children and the mother, my mom. So she may not have been aware. She complained occasionally about perhaps rowdiness on the part of the kids, and perhaps it was strange for her to have her boys and one daughter, and a girl, be able to do things that were strange to her. She never went to school. We were using books, using pens, and various things.

**CP:** Did they place an emphasis on education, growing up?

**KH:** You know, it was actually the biggest emphasis they had. Although poor, it was really in the case of both parents, and the leadership was, to tell you the truth, was my dad's role as the leader of the family, who although was illiterate, he felt he had to learn to read and write, and he did it when he was perhaps 25 or 30. At construction sites he worked as a laborer, and he became literate, barely. He was able to write and read. So he didn't even allow us, those of us siblings who

were good at school—as long as we had good grades, he didn't allow us to help him in the little farm. And particularly myself, I felt spoiled and perhaps I regret it a little bit, because many, many decades later, I feel like I'm not very good with my hands. I don't do many things with my hands. Some people think I'm egghead, perhaps. [Laughs]

**CP:** [Laughs] So you thrived in school, then?

**KH:** I did, and with very limited means. The brother I had who was closest to my age [0:10:00], three years older, I caught up with him. He repeated a couple of years, and we ended up finishing grade school together, and doing all middle school and high school years together. And my dad tried very hard to have us in the same classroom, because in that way we could share one book and one bike, and one of many things to avoid extra expenses.

**CP:** Besides school, what interested you when you were growing up?

**KH:** It was mostly bare feet soccer with whatever we could get our hands on, a ball of any kind. And we played after school, but we had duties. My only sister was already married, long married, and at home there were five boys, and my father gone to do work, so we did many, many chores at home—not the farming. The chores we did were bring water, because we didn't have running water; we didn't have, of course, electricity. So we would bring firewood; we would bring water.

My role was mostly water, with the donkey and four pitchers on top of a donkey, and I would ride the animal all the way to the source, to the spring, and get help, because I was too little to carry the pitchers up and down filling them; they were heavy. So it was a nice routine after school, going to the spring out about three miles. And luckily we had two streams crossing the Oasis—gone today, unfortunately, but we had them, and it was a nice venue for us to enjoy swimming in the ponds of the streams. And it was very clean then, there was no industrial pollution, so we used it to shower as well.

**CP:** You talk about an oasis. Was the area you were in a desert?

**KH:** It is not the concept of oasis as a palm grove in the middle of nowhere. It is a coastal oasis, so it is near the ocean, and it has perhaps 300,000 to half a million date palm trees. The fruit is dates. And surrounded by very arid areas, so it's like a delta carved in history by floods, and the mesa-level areas on the right and left, or north and south, are barren, somewhat barren, but it is very lush inside the valley, and lush with of course the crown-level greenery of the date palm crowns. And we call it the three-level agriculture. It's very intensive. It's not enriching, or it's not very large-scale, but it has three levels: dates at the top, and all kinds of fruit. I mentioned earlier pomegranates, but we had grapes and other things, peach and apple, and stuff, at the second level of height, on the ground. And the third, which is on the ground, is for vegetables.

So whoever has a little piece of land, they can survive with nice fruit and vegetables, clean and healthy. And at that time, up to 1970 or '75, we had good water through the streams, and it was a nice engineering system perhaps developed thousands of years ago. And we could irrigate our lands any time we wanted to, almost twice a week. Unfortunately again, today the water is gone, for other reasons we may get into later.

**CP:** What were your protein sources?

**KH:** We had little, I think I would say chickens, and egg, and sometimes rabbits. And we couldn't afford meat except for special holidays. In our minds at that time, meat was related to holidays, like for Christians. One would imagine a poor family might think you need to have meat, turkey or something at Thanksgiving, and perhaps something else at Christmas. Over there it usually, it was the Muslim holidays. And I would say raising chickens, and we had a few animals also, like perhaps a couple of sheep, and a couple of goats, and it was part of my work helping the household, was to also take them to graze, take these animals to graze. I did it perhaps every, not every day, but a few times a week. And I would collect, also, grass, cut grass from the sides of the stream to feed the animals.

**CP:** Well, you eventually focused your studies on engineering. [0:15:00] When did that start? How did that interest sort of begin for you?

**KH:** Actually it was somewhat imposed on me, because I was doing—in Tunisia we have, we had a French system for education. So at age fifteen, sixteen, kids would choose in high school to do either a math major; there were majors and I

did math, and my brother did literature, or humanities. And in 1971 when I finished high school, I signed up to do math and physics, a double major. But then I received a letter October of that year, it was the beginning of the first, freshman year for me, telling me the government has decided to give me a scholarship if I accept studying engineering. And I did. So it wasn't my choice, but I liked it, and I was passionate about it eventually. And I finished up to a master's degree in Tunis, in Engineering, Civil and Environmental Engineering.

**CP:** Well, then talk about your undergraduate studies at Université de Tunis?

**KH:** Yeah, Université de Tunis. The name of the school is E-N-I-T, ENIT, École nationale d'ingénieurs de Tunis. At that time Tunisia had a very small university, only in the capital city and nowhere else in the country. So everybody would go travel by train, or whatever other means, to Tunis, which I did. And I did prep school of the type which is in college, like freshman and sophomore, everybody does the same bacc core, and then myself and 110 others were given the choice of doing civil engineering, or electrical, or the other engineering types, majors. I chose civil engineering. My father had worked in highway construction, talked to me about it, and he became quite skilled as a foreman, and he was proud to tell me that he was able to take care of 150 workers. So I wanted to please him, and I said I will do civil engineering like he had been in civil engineering, although he wasn't an engineer himself. And he was actually very proud of that, and so was I.

**CP:** What was the adjustment like for you from living in a rural environment, to moving to the city and being a college student?

**KH:** Well, it's perhaps a long story but we have to make it short. There are—I teach language now here at Oregon State. I teach Arabic and French, and I tell my students, in Arabic at least, that there are differences in dialect between various parts of the same country. So one of the adjustments I had to make was the fact that I spoke a southern accent, which sounded like a country yokel landing in the big city, so to speak. And my fellow students at the School of Engineering sort of snickered and made fun of us, me and the others who came from the south, and other parts of the country. Not for long, though, because within a few weeks when the grades started appearing and we were doing better than they were at engineering, they were humbled a little bit. [Laughs]

So one of the adjustments is to learn how to speak the accent or the dialect of the capital city, how to adjust to, of course, being away from family, but I was frugal and the scholarship of 30 dinars, equivalent of at that time 60 dollars a month, was more than enough. I had two siblings in France who helped me with some clothes. Many Tunisian immigrants worked in France and sent remittances or brought gifts, and my presents were pieces of clothing, a coat or a suit, things like that.

**CP:** So you didn't have to work a job while you were an undergraduate?

**KH:** Not at all, yeah, luckily. Education, instituted by the same man I keep mentioning, Bourguiba, was free and universal all the way to the end of school, including tertiary education or higher education. So I did not have to work. The scholarship was modest, but it was sufficient. And perhaps during the master's degree period I tried to do tutoring to make a little extra money for movies and buying books. So I did put an ad in the local *La Presse* newspaper, and I tutored math and physics to children who were in high school at that time.

**CP:** What was the city like to live in for you?

**KH:** Actually, it was overwhelming because although I kept to myself, we were very busy with engineering. [0:20:00] The toughest program actually at the university was Engineering, with up to 35, 37 hours of presence in the classroom dealing with professors, and learning from them. And homework, and we lived in a *cit *—I mean, a dorm, which was brand new, which was nice because it was a double room very close to the university. Because we were very busy. We stayed away from the city as much as possible. I went in; it was—I want to say I went in because campus was located, is located, not quite outside, but maybe five miles, six miles outside the downtown area, yeah.

**CP:** Well, did you have a social life that you were able to—? [Laughs] It sounds like you were pretty busy. What was social life like for you?

**KH:** Oh, I think the social life was actually congregating with friends. We played rami and other types of card games. We went out to the movies occasionally. But I was also involved. I volunteered to work in the equivalent of ASOSU, the student government, or back then we called it syndicate, *syndicat* in French. Already, sophomore year, myself and four others were requested by the dean, because we had sort of wild strike against something that I can't even remember now, but we went on strike two days.

And the dean, who was an excellent guy and trained in an Ivy League school in France and wanted to emulate that school, which is École Polytechnique, he said, "If you want to make noise and do disturbances, why don't you just not go on vacation?" This was like December, and he chose five of us - "and you, and you, and you" - because we were outspoken. And we didn't go on vacation, and we wrote the constitution and the bylaws of, as I said, the equivalent to ASOSU student government. And I became a member of the student government at that time. But we were the "founding group" of the school's government, because our school had started in 1969. I arrived in 1971, which there weren't many things institutionally, except that charismatic leadership of Mr. Latiri, the dean. And our contribution, modest as it was, was to set up the government, and I was involved in that.

**CP:** Do you remember what you did, what the government did, in terms of its activities once it was established?

**KH:** Yeah. We tried to deal with the usual demands of the students, channel sometimes the anger, sometimes the disagreements between the students and faculty, or students and staff. And we had actually a difficult period between '72 and '75, frequent strikes, and maybe it's not the point to be getting into too many details about that, but politics got into it, both local and international. The '70s, as you know, there were wars in the Middle East. There was a struggle for freedom in Africa, in other parts of Africa. And so the students, myself included, echoed those developments, international developments. And we also rejected a few decisions by the minister of higher education about small things, sometimes, that maybe look now in hindsight very small, but to us it was important to say no, or to try to argue over certain things.

**CP:** Well, as you mentioned, you continued on and got your master's degree in Civil and Environmental Engineering at the same institution?

**KH:** Yeah. So, back then there was, as I said, freshman and sophomore bacc core for everyone. And then third year all the way to year number six, in one stretch of four years of applied engineering courses and projects, and internships in the summer. In summer of '76 I secured an internship at a resort town by the name of Sousse, two hours south of Tunis, and I collected data about the city of Sousse for my topic being for the master's project, graduating project, was water disposal and treatment for one city, for the city by the name of Sousse. And I did that project. [0:24:58]

And what I hadn't mentioned is the fact that our school was built by the Soviets in the context of cooperation between Tunisia and the Soviet Union, not that Bourguiba was pro-Communist or anything. Bourguiba was an extremely pragmatic president. He asked for help first from France, former colonial power, and he got some help for grade school and high school. He asked for help because Tunisia was left really bare-bones by the French when they left, nothing in terms of the education or health infrastructure, for example. They did infrastructure, that helped them extract resources, but they did not help Tunisians with education, health, and other things.

In any case, it turned out that the Soviets said yes to Bourguiba's emissaries, and they built this school. They designed it, they built it, and they staffed it. Four out of five of my professors were Russians teaching in French. Our language of science and engineering was French, and they were speaking broken French, and that was one of the issues we talked about with our dean, about transfer of knowledge through broken French, sometimes. [Laughs]

**CP:** Are there substantial differences between what graduate school was like for you in Tunisia and what we would know it as here, as a master's program?

**KH:** I actually came to it for the doctoral program here, but back in Tunisia, yes. At that time the system was not clear. There was no tradition of advanced studies in Tunisia. Again, I put the blame squarely on the French, because they dominated and ruled the country 75 years; they could have established a real system but they did not. In any case, yes, there was more self-reliance, when I came here, expected of the graduate student, although major professors varied in their ways of helping or not helping, helping enough or not helping enough.

Back in Tunisia, my major professor for the master's program, Professor Nikolai—I still remember his name—from Moscow State University, he had spent maybe five years at our school. But he was extremely helpful, and spent a lot of time talking with me about various stages of my design and calculations, and the blueprints I was drafting, and the report I was writing. I found, actually, similar help here. I want to say a very good word about—of thanks—about my professors, professors here, particularly major professor Lee Schroeder.

But there are differences. Graduate the students here in the American system need to be more self-directed, maybe today things have changed in Tunisia and there maybe a similarity now, but in my time professors were extremely generous with their time. And perhaps it was a peculiarity, because the Russians, or the Soviets, who came to teach, they were in the socialist system, which means they lived together in one block of housing, and they came to the school every morning at 8 in a bus, and they did not leave until 6 pm in the bus. So they were there for us to ask questions, and sit with them. They were stuck; they didn't have cars. [Laughs]

**CP:** [Laughs] Well, you finished up in 1977. You spent four years in the private sector as a civil engineer with a Danish firm?

**KH:** Yes, the firm I worked for was actually mixed Tunisian and Danish, set up by my boss at the time. His name was Mustafa Beji. He made the acquaintance of this Ramboll Hannemann, which is the Danish firm based in Copenhagen, because Ramboll Hannemann did some projects with a government company in Tunisia, and they knew each other then. And he hired three of us from ENIT same year; we graduated in June '77. And we ranked top of the class. I was in Civil Engineering, and then my friends Lotfi and Hakim, one in Mechanical and one in Electrical.

And Mr. Beji hired the three of us because the company was really starting, and we were the first Tunisian engineers. We learned the ropes, so to speak, from our senior engineers, our senior colleagues who came from Denmark and spent a number of years there to help us. [0:29:59] So I worked for actually a little more than that, maybe four and a half years. And within about six months I started taking care of projects, not just doing computations. I became a project manager for various projects around the country.

I should perhaps mention that I delayed my first job. Although I accepted the job in July, I did not start until November, because I was given a scholarship by the German embassy. It was very convenient because I had finished my master's degree in June, and at that time I had been doing German at the Goethe Institute, part of the German Embassy at Tunis, for two and a half years. And my professor, my language teacher, came to me; he said, "The group of professors who knew you for the past two and a half years decided that you deserve to have a scholarship, and would you accept?" I said, "Of course I would." So I got the scholarship to do intensive German, and at the time we called it West Berlin, because Germany was still divided into two countries, right? So I delayed my work in the company by the name of Tunisie Consult, started in November, because I wanted to enjoy pursuing the two months of intensive German, which I did.

**CP:** Was this your first travel outside of Tunisia?

**KH:** Actually, no, because I was lucky. From year one at the School of Engineering—I was only 19—those of us who had a high GPA were selected to go to Russia, because the Russians were intent on giving a good show of professors, and laboratory equipment, plus summer internships and travel to Russia. So my first trip was in '72. I spent five weeks in Moscow, Kiev, and Leningrad. And then I traveled abroad again a couple of times, maybe three times, before I did the German intensive course.

**CP:** What impressions are lasting from the trip to the Soviet Union?

**KH:** [Laughs] Wherever we went, the hotel was in the same name. Intourist in Moscow, Intourist in Leningrad, in St. Petersburg, Intourist in Kiev. But many other things. We also rode the elevator to the tower, Stalingrad Tower, and we had five or six students who were guides with us on the bus. And we had a great time. And a big impression that stands out, actually still today, is the fact that we saw so many museums. I mean, I was enthused to be visiting museums, but we visited two per day almost for the entire trip, and it was an overload, but it was fascinating: the castles of the tsars, and various art museums, and of course the tomb of Lenin, which I saw in 1972.

**CP:** What was the common language among students?



**KH:** Yeah, we had a guide, a lady, who spoke French to us.

**CP:** Okay.

**KH:** And she introduced, she translated between us and our hosts at various places. But we picked up a few words here and there because our professors had already been using numerical tables because there was no computer at the time. We read from Russian textbooks, so we ended up trying to understand, translate the headings of the tables, and rows, and columns and things. But then after I returned, I decided I should learn some Russian, so I also took two years of Russian, all gone now, but I did manage to learn basic dialogues.

**CP:** So the interest in language has been there for a long time?

**KH:** Yes, actually I can say that maybe people are geeks with computers. I am a geek with languages. And the story goes, according to my mother, that when I was a baby I did not walk or talk until I was about four.

**CP:** [Laughs]

**KH:** They claim it's three and a half to four, and my mother was worried after a second year not talking. She superstitiously thought, well, I think in the local traditions you feed the baby, the child, cooked tongues of animals, a lamb, because we would slaughter a lamb once a year. She would collect tongues from the neighbors, of the lambs, and she would feed them to me because she thought by feeding me seven tongues, I would end up talking, being able to talk, which eventually occurred, happened. [0:35:00] And I am sure it's a coincidence, but when I discovered that later on, she told me about it, I sort of promised her that I will try to learn seven tongues. [Laughs] I learned six.

**CP:** Well, it sounds like you were pretty well prepared to be a civil engineer and your career was moving along steadily. But in 1981 a pretty big change in your life came about, and you moved to the United States. Tell me how all of this transpired.

**KH:** Yeah, it's, we say in French, "*l'hasard fait bien les choses*," chance sometimes sets things in the right way. One of my Danish colleagues told me once that he had heard there was a scholarship for Tunisians to come, to go to the United States, and I immediately asked him for details, and he got me the details because he had connections. And I went to the American professor, Dr. Prawl, who was from the University of Missouri at Columbia, in Tunisia. I went to the Ministry of Agriculture and I introduced myself. At that time of course, backtracking a little bit, I felt a little bit upset with corruption. I tried—I was an idealist in my ways of doing engineering, and I would not sign a work document that would give money to the contractor if the work was not according to specs. And I had some occasional arguments with contractors who tried to get away with things. And once I found out that in spite of my not signing, the contractor got his money, which was insulting to me.

So I started looking for other ways; I was bored and making good money, but not being able to travel again for a while. So the American professor—I introduced myself; I said out of boredom I had done the TOEFL Test, and I had received a high score, in the top ten percent of my session. But I explained to him that I am not a government employee and I know the scholarship is for government employees. "Would you consider looking at my resume and documents?" He said yeah. So I put in the *cum laude* document, and the TOEFL high score, and the various documents, and within two months he came back and said, "You are in." I was in. And Oregon State was the first university who answered with a yes to my application. It was processed by people by University of Missouri at Columbia; I sent out applications to three or four places. OSU came through first; that's why I'm here. So as I said earlier, *l'hasard fait bien les choses*—it's chance.

**CP:** So I'm interested in knowing what the Tunisian perception of the U.S. was at the time, and what your initial impression was, and how those two may or may not have jibed with one another?

**KH:** Tunisia is tiny today. In 2014, it's only eleven million, a little under eleven million. It was perhaps eight, eight and a half in 1980. But the impression about Americans, about the United States, it varies from group to group, because if one is educated and following the international news, at my age at that time, we may have been sort of critical of certain ways. For example, I was critical of the Vietnam War, already in the '70s. And I don't know how we got hold of *Time Magazine*. I used to look at it. I may have gone to the American Cultural Center, couldn't afford buying it; it was not available in many places. But I read it occasionally. And I grew up actually in high school listening to an American Army

radio station broadcasting from Libya, because there was an American base there. It's called Wheelus Air Force Base. So I was following the news about the United States also from American sources; that's at least for me.

In general the perception in Tunisia was a sort of admiration, and feeling of being overwhelmed by this big country, because wherever you turned you have American culture. I grew up watching cowboy movies, including Clint Eastwood, but speaking French. Like, when they say *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, "*Le bon, la brute et le truand*," was the title in French. And so we had elements of American culture. In the '70s we watched *Dallas*, speaking in French. [0:40:00] So you see, the perception is based on whatever trickled from the dominant Anglo-Saxon or American culture, plus, of course, world events, so world events had a role as well. In '79 and '80 there was the big standoff between Iran and the United States, and we were aware of that. In 1980, the invasion by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the invasion of Iran, and we were aware of that. And the United States had a role in many things, particularly already in the '60s and '70s, the role between Arabs and Israelis; America had a role. So we were aware of that too.

But I am—I grew up enamored with the language. Although I still have an accent and I make many mistakes in English, I liked English very much. My teachers in high school, perhaps of seven, five of them were Peace Corps volunteers, and they were the best people I have ever met, because they were more dedicated than my local teachers. We had some French, some Tunisian in high school. And I had a positive view overall of what the United States meant.

**CP:** Well, tell me about arriving in Corvallis and making that adjustment, getting settled?

**KH:** I landed in 1981 in Columbia, Missouri, to get some paperwork done, and then I flew here. And it was amazing, because although I grew up in greenery, the oasis, I found myself in another oasis, unlike Tunis. The capital city where I had spent most of my life after age eighteen was urban; it has greenery, but not the same as in oasis. But here, I was very impressed. And the first thing I did, of course, was to walk around to locate things, and one of two places I wanted to find out: the library and the newspaper office. I don't know why, but I like, I am a news junkie, and I also am a bookworm, and I like to discover where they were located and I found them. This was a long time before the library was expanded in '94-'95. It was called Kerr Library at that time.

**CP:** Were you able to identify any sort of Arab community or North African community in Corvallis at the time?

**KH:** Yeah, I would say it was mainly students. I don't go to the mosque. Actually, at that time there was no mosque, but within a short time they built one. But I do not go to the mosque. My meeting was through the classroom; I met a Saudi friend, and a few Tunisians. And then it was a time of actually an influx of Tunisians in great numbers, relatively speaking. Today for example, in 2014, I think there are two Tunisian students, maybe three. In '81 when I arrived, we were perhaps eight or ten, and then within three or four years, there were 40.

**CP:** Wow!

**KH:** And they would do English here, and then go elsewhere, or they would do academics here. And I ended up founding—I was the founder of the Tunisian Students Association. I did found a number of groups, Friends of Palestine in 1982 or '83, Tunisian Student Association, and then North African Student Association, all in the '80s, so I was active in—I was actually a senator for foreign students at ASOSU in '84.

**CP:** So were most of these Tunisians coming through the same program that you arrived in?

**KH:** Mostly. It's called TTP, Technology Transfer Project. It's money from USAID, from the American government to the Tunisian government, to train hundreds of Tunisians in advanced study of various fields, but mainly Engineering. And many of us now are around the world, including we have a member of Parliament in Tunis, we have CEOs of some companies in Tunisia, and professors at universities in many places. And all of them trained by Oregon State, or started at Oregon State and completed the degrees elsewhere. It's a big linkage between—Oregon State has had a huge role actually back in Tunisia. Maybe if we have time we will get to it further, programs and projects I did. The footprint of Oregon State, and the word Oregon, is oversized in Tunisia; it has been. It's shrinking a little bit because we haven't done much in the past three years [0:45:01], but everybody knew about Oregon and Oregon State, because there was these hundreds of Tunisians being trained there, plus projects being done by us, by me and colleagues here over the past 25 years. As I said, it's shrinking a little bit but we are working on it, working on reviving it.

**CP:** That's fascinating. So you were in Civil Engineering when you arrived here. Was this the Ph.D. program?

**KH:** Yeah. I was accepted in the Ph.D. program in September of 1981. I did my qualifying exams in '85, I think, '84. But also I worked on my dissertation for another couple of years, three years, and I did not defend my dissertation, for various reasons. The scholarship had ended; I couldn't finish, and I was distracted by various things, particularly in terms of surviving, everything about money. And my passion was not in engineering anymore at some point, and that's why I'm teaching languages now and doing professional translations. I've published a number of books in translation.

My passion was in language when I was a kid. I was given engineering, as I mentioned earlier, because the scholarship was there; I couldn't survive without it. But I liked it and excelled in it, to a degree, until I got bored with doing it as an engineer, and then I did the Ph.D. program here until I got bored with engineering. I still do it. I teach—when I take American students to study abroad, I teach Introduction to Sustainable Development in a Condition of Scarcity of Natural Resources, with, of course, a case study being Tunisia. Also, I am an advisor to a private corporation in Tunisia owned by my brother, so it is easy for me to arrange for that, and I work when I can, and I give him executive intelligence and feasibility studies about the quality of products, and steel, and other transportation systems, and things like that. So I am not totally away from engineering.

**CP:** Yeah. Well, tell me a bit more about this time period. It sounds like you were very active with these different student groups. I guess I'm just wondering a little bit more about what you were up to, aside from the engineering, during time period, and what the climate was like for you on campus?

**KH:** Yeah. The '80s was actually a heady time, in the sense that I felt liberated. I came from a place where—Tunisia is a great country, with a priority having been at that time to do economic development and to try to survive. And as I said, I repeated many times, my perception of the President at that time was so-so; it was positive but with some problems about freedom of expression. I felt liberated when I moved here. I was able to do what I wanted. And I had sent, for example, a couple of times, perhaps, an essay, an op-ed, to a newspaper in Tunis, and they didn't print it. So I thought, "Hm, maybe I don't write well."

Well, I come to the United States; I use English as a third language. I find out that I can put together a group, and there are rules, and I read them, and I did follow the rules, and the group became very active. This was Friends of Palestine, because I am actually extremely attached to the concept that with justice you can build many, many good things. Absent justice, we continue to have problems. That's the basis why, yeah, why I felt a group Friends of Palestine was necessary at Oregon State. We did many, many projects, including perhaps a dozen speakers from around the country, and movies and other cultural events. I became a senator representing foreign students. And then I took care of Tunisian students as an association, North African students, when there were Moroccans and Algerians as well.

So overall, the liberation I felt in terms of being able to express myself, I sent an op-ed to the *Gazette-Times* and it got printed! So it looks like I know English better than my second language, or maybe freedom of expression was not present there in Tunis when I tried to publish something in the local *La Presse* in French. So I also, in the '80s I got to teach French once a week in the community college. [0:50:00] And that opened up another horizon of staying with languages, which, yeah.

**CP:** Well, you did that for a while. It looks like from 1984 to 1992 you were teaching at Linn-Benton Community College?

**KH:** That was, yeah, but at the same time I was a student still. I did advanced courses in ESL, English as a Second Language, and adult education, and things related to teaching, college teaching, through the College of Education here. And then I went back to Tunisia to do the home stay in the early '90s. Home stay is related to the type of visa I had. Local citizens of the United States who were born here don't know what home stay means, but it is a type of visa that requires the person, after finishing school, to go home and stay at least two years, which I did.

**CP:** Okay, so you started out in Engineering; you switched to the linguistics work. Now, did you finish that before you did the home stay, or did you?

**KH:** No, I switched majors here before I went home.

**CP:** Right.

**KH:** But then I went home to stay the two years in 1991, and I actually stayed a little longer than that, from late '91, '92. I stayed three years in Tunisia.

**CP:** Who were some colleagues or other folks that were important to you during that first phase at OSU?

**KH:** Well, a number of people I would—I think people who are gone, like had been students, perhaps it's not very important to mention them. But I had colleagues like, for example, my wife, of course. I fell in love with my wife here at Oregon State, after having done committee work, and we did projects together eventually. And in the '90s, early '90s, she began to teach there, and we got married in Tunisia in '94.

**CP:** But you had met in the '80s?

**KH:** Oh, yeah. No, we did work together. She was a professor and I was a student, but we seriously became involved when she arrived in Tunisia, and she was a visiting Fulbright professor.

**CP:** And she was a professor of Comparative Literature and Gender Studies, is that correct?

**KH:** Yeah, and she is Emerita now, and we still work together. We designed, in collaboration with two other colleagues, Joseph Krause and Chris Sproul, the study abroad Oregon State has instituted and set up for Tunisia. And we ran it together for eight years; our first session was 2004. I would like to mention another member of the faculty who was actually a good friend, still is a good friend, Professor Rich Daniels, who was also English Department. He was involved in the Central America Task Force. I was involved in Friends of Palestine. We did the coalition together, and we worked for justice issues, social justice at the global level. I passed—at that time when I was a senator for ASOSU for international students, I wrote and got a resolution passed against Apartheid in South Africa. This was 1984—'84.

And Rich Daniels, I mention him because he helped me. When he saw the news in the *Barometer* about it he approached me, and together we did the resolution through the city council in 1984 also against, protesting Apartheid in South Africa. It was a time, of course—we're talking about Reagan period, and involved in Central America and so-called constructive engagement. Our government at that time was in favor of constructive engagement, so to speak, with the white government in South Africa. I personally was for justice, and I felt Apartheid was wrong. And Rich Daniels helped me, and together we got the resolution passed at the city council. This was five years before Mandela, or six years before Mandela was released, and it was a very little action, but I am very proud of it.

**CP:** Yeah. What kind of community were you operating in, in terms of kind of the student activist community? Was it a small group of people, or was it—I'm interested in sort of that culture on campus at the time.

**KH:** Actually, the core group is perhaps a dozen, at least for Friends of Palestine. And then, whenever there is an event, it was possible for us to mobilize three times that number for active duty, to distribute leaflets and come attend a meeting and help out. So twelve, ten or twelve people were extremely busy, hardworking individuals. And the community helped out. We had a few members of the community who were residents here, were not students. [0:55:00] They were very sympathetic with what we did, and we agreed on the idea of the concept of justice. So we were really grateful that the community helped out. And the community is not only the Arab community. There was like one father of a professor here who came from Palestine in the '40s, late '40s. The rest were fellow Americans who were concerned about issues like that.

**CP:** Did you ever find that within the Arab community of students here on campus, that there was any tension over the fact that you were not a practicing Muslim?

**KH:** Yes and no. In general, I just say my piece and stand my ground. That's how I grew up. I stand my ground, and my philosophy in life is my own, and I don't trespass on other peoples' beliefs, and they don't trespass on mine. But in 1988 we invited—when I say we, my student groups; there are more than one, Friends of Palestine plus North African Student Association. I invited, I helped invite, a major figure of Arab feminism from Egypt, and she came and gave a lecture. And there were 400 people attending in the MU Ballroom, and there was a sort of standoff a little bit, with tough questions and commentary by mosque people trying to tell our speaker that her analysis was wrong.

And yes, I got flak from both sides after that. The mosque people told me, "Why did you invite a godless woman to speak?" Nawal Saadaoui, her name, Professor Nawal Saadaoui, psychiatrist and writer from Cairo. And they were upset with me. We knew each other. They knew I didn't go to mosque, but I respected them; they respected me. They chastised me for inviting an atheist. But my other friends, who like me, are Muslim by culture but not practicing, chastised me and said, "Why did you inform the mosque people to come ruin the lecture by their long-winded questions?" So I got flak from both ends. But it doesn't matter, because I just had to stand my ground, and I do what I believe is important, that's all.

**CP:** Yeah, it seems to me it would be difficult. I mean, the student population is small enough here that if you were not involved with the mosque culture, it would seem to be limiting the amounts of folks that you would interact with on a regular basis. I mean, I would have to guess, anyway, that the mosque is sort of a central, plays a central role for a lot of Arab students in Corvallis.

**KH:** I have a lot of respect for the role played by the mosque, and I interacted over the years with some of them. I went a couple of times to visit. But yes, many Arab students use the mosque as an anchor for their community life, and I respect that, and I actually am very happy we have the mosque in Corvallis. But there ought to be—there is always a need for alternate communities, like we have in many churches, or we have civil, non-religious groups, because it all depends on what the people feel comfortable with. I mean, we needed the mosque, in the sense that—for ritualistic things, like maybe once a year for the holidays. But there are people who want to pray five times, who want to go to the group prayer Friday, particularly, and I respect that, and I am very, very proud that our city has the mosque here.

**CP:** Well, tell me a little bit more about the switch away from engineering and into ESL and linguistics. I note here that one of your research emphases is a fascinating topic, humor in language teaching.

**KH:** Well, yeah. I mean, actually I took it from my teachers, not even at the university—my teachers in grade school and high school. The ones who impacted me more are the ones who made me laugh. And I felt my interaction with my teachers, particularly, as I said, grade school and high school, the good ones did not mind being challenged, did not mind having a repartee that maybe felt a little harsh or a little humorous. And I ended up finding out that every time I go through an episode that has laughter in it [1:00:01], it's relaxing, and the information stays with me easier. And I looked into it, I read about it, and I ended up—actually, I don't really claim that I make everybody laugh in the classroom, but often I ask my students, I warn them early, ask them whether they have thick skin or not, and very rarely did I get in trouble for using humor that is not appropriate.

**CP:** [Laughs]

**KH:** [Laughs] But it happened occasionally. But it's extremely important to make your audience get what you want, your point, in a relaxed atmosphere. Your point as a teacher or a professor is to share knowledge, and challenge your students to do particular thinking, and master the language in the case of my discipline. I teach Arabic and French. So for example, I ask my students to bring me one joke, one proverb, and one tongue twister every day, when I did intensive French for many summers. And they enjoyed it; it was like the key part of the session. We had three-hour sessions, and if you don't have a little variety and laughter, three hours is deadly to teach any discipline. So I managed by doing that.

**CP:** So you were a doctoral candidate. Am I correct about this?

**KH:** I'm ABD, I'm all up on dissertation in Civil Engineering, and I did only a series of advanced courses in ESL, adult college education instruction, through the education here. And then I went for three months of training in France in '92. From Tunis, I flew to France and Strasbourg, and I did special training for three months at the Centre Universitaire du Journalisme, which is a university center for journalism. It's about cross-cultural communication. So I took a number of courses in Strasbourg. For a change, I was working for my brother.

**CP:** This was during the home stay period?

**KH:** Yeah, yeah. And I signed up. I found an ad in *Le Monde* newspaper, *The Washington Post* of France, and I signed up and went and did the three months of training in cross-cultural communication in Strasbourg, northeast France, yeah.

**CP:** Do I assume there is a substantial Tunisian culture in France? Or a community of Tunisian ex-pats?

**KH:** Although I kept to myself, yes, we have. There are easily, I think I could say, 400,000 Tunisians perhaps in France, 350 to 400,000. Wherever you go, you don't need to look for a red cap; not many people use it, but the features are obvious. For somebody like me, I mean, a Tunisian almost can tell whether the person crossing paths with is Tunisian or Algerian or Moroccan, almost. But that's ethnic profiling; we don't want to do that. But yes, there are 400,000 Tunisians, perhaps, in France, and it's a big community with a strong link to the country, and they send remittances in great amounts, which is part of the Tunisian economy.

**CP:** But you didn't immerse yourself too much in that when you were there?

**KH:** No, I did not. I was focusing on the training I was doing, and I actually met Tunisians perhaps only during travel in and out of France, but not during the training, no.

**CP:** And then you went back to Tunisia for a, this was a two- or three-year period, the home stay?

**KH:** Yeah.

**CP:** And you were doing consulting and translation work?

**KH:** Actually I worked for Les Carrières du Sud, which is a company owned by my brother, as an engineer. And I did also open an office, and did consulting with business people, and particularly relation with a neighboring country by the name of Malta, where I attended business meetings and I linked up with partners between the two countries. And also in '94, my wife had arrived then, and we became husband and wife in March of 1994. We did an international conference. The Embassy of the United States asked Laura Rice, my wife, and me, to take care of the Arab Region Summit for Women, in preparation of the Beijing Summit. Beijing Summit for Women was in '95, and each region had a preparatory meeting. Laura and I ran the one in Tunis for the Arab region. It took us several months of work, and the event took place in December. [1:05:00] And I did a translation of the country reports and the various other documents for that project, yes.

**CP:** How was your marrying an American received?

**KH:** Oh, it was a routine matter in my case, because my mother was still alive at the time, and we did a very subdued ceremony because we were busy traveling. We had just a civil ceremony where we signed the marriage contract, and had drinks and things at the municipality. And the event was presided over by a friend of mine who was the mayor, and I was sitting next to the bride, my wife, and I was the groom, but also the interpreter for her.

**CP:** [Laughs]

**KH:** And to go back to humor, the text he was reading, the mayor was reading was, as you know, sort of staid and official, but I put in a little grain of salt in my translation. Laura wasn't sure whether I was [laughs], so to make the event be a little more lively.

**CP:** Uh-huh.

**KH:** Yeah.

**CP:** Okay, so you finished the three-year home stay period. Did you come back to Corvallis at that point?

**KH:** We, my wife and I, had been working on this conference I told you, and other activities in Tunis. She was teaching as a Fulbright visiting professor. In '95, in August, we came back to Corvallis, and we stayed since then. Our home base is Corvallis. She was a professor here until 2010, and I started doing grants again, which I had done work at the various parts of Oregon State, including International Programs, as a graduate student assistant, and I learned how to write grants. And Laura and I ended up having a number of projects federally funded to take us back to Tunisia and do R and D work with colleagues in Tunisia. That started shortly after we arrived here and our first big project was in 1998.

**CP:** What were some of those projects?

**KH:** For '98 we had done the grant writing, of course, in '97, it was a three-year project to introduce or integrate the use of internet in teaching and research at six university colleges in Tunisia, three—two in Tunis, and four in my hometown in Gabès. And we did the project over three years. Teams of professors from here went to Tunis with us, and we brought also trainees from Tunisia to here, sometimes for a month, sometimes for two weeks. And that was, as I said, to help them.

At the time, in the late '90s, internet wasn't very widespread. The penetration of technology like that in was still low in Africa. But we played a good role to help our colleagues demystify the concept, the tool of—you can use email at that time, and a little bit the web, and searches. And they were actually appreciative of the effort. And we took maybe ten, twelve professors from here over the years, sometimes repeat, the same persons going more than once. And we brought for that project maybe 35 or 36 Tunisians to do training here. And then we did another project later.

**CP:** Did the environment for you at all change after 9/11?

**KH:** 9/11. 9/11, when it happened my wife and I were in Gabès, actually. And my brother, the businessman, called me up immediately. He says, "Are you near a TV set?" I said, "What's the problem?" He says, "Go watch." So we had given our TV set as a present, wedding present, to our niece, so we looked for another place to watch. And it was a tragedy that caused us sort of confusion. For a mixed couple, an Arab man and an American woman, we felt, are they going to allow me to land? We were scheduled to land in Detroit, I think, for customs, in November. And it was a non-event. I mean, I felt exhilarated that I landed in Detroit; I actually had a terrible stomach ache for a while, airline food or something. But it was a non-event. This was only six weeks or seven weeks after 9/11. And I was very pleased, because it helps improve the confidence, the trust in the system [1:10:00], that I hear about horror stories of people who are on a so-called no-fly lists and things like that. Well, the good news for me is the system works, at least in my case. And I am very appreciative of that; it's important.

**CP:** And the same is true in Corvallis? You arrived and everything was as it always had been for you?

**KH:** Mostly, I think. Two years ago, like nine years after 9/11, I was walking by campus here near the music building here, and four kids in a car saw this, and they were driving by, and yelled something loud, and I couldn't repeat it. And it was unpleasant, but that's the exception that confirms the rule of Corvallis being a great place.

**CP:** Yeah. Well, you started as a full-time instructor, or you started instructing in French and Arabic in 2002. Do you continue to do that today?

**KH:** Actually, Arabic is a quest of mine, because part of my activism in the '80s involved defending my identity, and there was no Arabic at Oregon State. So I worked with the OSU Foundation as a clerk part-time for ten hours a week, and I discovered that I was able to set up a fund for Arabic, an account, which I did. I put in a little money out of pocket, and I filled out the form, and now the oldest language fund at Oregon State is the Arabic Language Fund, ALF. And it's not a pitch for people to donate, but it is there. It took another twelve years, because when I set up the Arabic Fund in '89, I was hoping within a year or two, OSU would start offering Arabic. It didn't work. It was not a priority.

Now it's history, and in 2002, the president of Oregon State decided there is money to start Arabic. That's when I started teaching Arabic. French I had taught already as an assistant in '89 here at OSU, but it didn't last very long. And when I started in 2002 teaching Arabic, occasionally there would be courses in French that were available for me to teach, which I did. And now I am teaching just half-time, often under half-time, but going up, I hope, with French and Arabic, because I am developing two or three French courses online for the online BA that we are putting together.

And Arabic has doubled in numbers just this term. Instead of fifteen or eighteen, I have 44 in first year. We had to set up a second section. Both of them are closed; they're full, which is very good news, because our neighbors at U of O and PSU, they have more than 100 students. Some of them have 150, which is proof there is demand for Arabic. And Oregon State would be well-advised to keep offering Arabic and expand it, because I think there is room for that. And I have people in the military, people from FBI, people from the civil society, and just the freshmen taking Arabic. There is demand.

**CP:** So are you the only Arabic teacher that OSU has ever had?

**KH:** No. My colleague Faiza, Professor Faiza al-Saaidi, she's an American from Yemen, has shared with me the teaching. Right now she is not available, but when she comes back we share the teaching. And we don't have enough FTE that

Oregon State would hire more people, but as I said, with this increased interest in Arabic, who knows? If we can start three or four sections of first-year, then we could have somebody else teach as well. Plus, in a few years, now I have an initiative. Call me the persistent Arab. That's not something that I invented; somebody else called me that. I'm very persistent for my goals, as modest as they may be. Arabic is important. Arabic will continue to be offered at Oregon State, and I have high hopes that there will be 3rd year and 4th year. If we have 3rd year and 4th year, we will need at least two instructors, perhaps three.

**CP:** So in your observation, students that are beginning French versus beginning Arabic, do you see a pronounced difference in their ability to kind of get going? I mean, one's a romance language and one's not.

**KH:** Absolutely, and you've got it, because the script, the alphabet, being totally different—28 characters we have in Arabic—are not related in any way to the Latin alphabet we use in English and French. Plus, the sounds are very different, and perhaps at another time I will challenge you in pronouncing some of these letters in Arabic. [1:15:02] But the attrition rate, I discovered over the years, in Arabic is higher than 50 percent, sometimes 70 percent. Those who start in first year don't come back second year. In French it's a little lower, and yes, people can become sort of functional after one year of French, but one year of Arabic? People who are patient enough, and they know they need more; stay with it. And those who are impatient say, "Well, it's too tough for me," and they leave. That's why attrition is higher, yeah.

**CP:** Well, in 2004 you co-founded the study abroad program in Tunisia, OSU study abroad program. Can you tell me about the genesis of that, and getting that going? I'm sure it was a major effort.

**KH:** It was a major effort, because I mean, thanks to a decision, executive decision by our president at the time, here in Oregon State in 2002, Arabic started. And we had been doing those study—those R and D exchanges I mentioned earlier. We got a second federal grant in 2003 to do three years of work with the same universities. And it was about other things, about environmental studies, and library development. Actually, a colleague from the library went with us, Bonnie Allen. At the same time, we were developing this study abroad. The four people who did it were, Chris Sproul; she's retired now, she was direct or of International Programs, Laura Rice, who is a professor in the English Department, myself, and Joseph Krause was the department head of Languages. He had an instrumental role in pushing for it.

And in 2002, between 2000 and 2002, we designed the program. We submitted it through the channels, the usual approval channels, including Faculty Senate. And for history, one has to mention a little anecdote. One professor, someone I forgot the name, but even if I remembered I wouldn't mention the name, was against the program. He says, "We don't want to send our students to dangerous places." Dangerous places. It's like one or two years after 9/11, so any Arab country becomes dangerous, which is not true. And we had like three days, four days before the senate meeting when it happened. And the person had stated strong reservations about it, who was going to influence, perhaps sway the vote.

Well, I wrote an email to the Embassy in Tunis, not to a friend, to the diplomat. I said, "Mr. Breeden, can you send an email to the following list of OSU executives, telling them your own opinion, as a representative of the Government of the United States in Tunis, whether it is safe and a good idea to send Americans?" He immediately sent an email, and we undid the risk of Faculty Senate going in the wrong direction. So I am very proud of that. I am proud of the fact that we did eight years of programming, of taking students. The big deal—actually, two features are a big deal for us. We offered two languages, not only Arabic, but Arabic and French, and we had participants from around the United States, and once or twice from Canada.

For example, Oregon State as I said earlier had a great footprint in Tunisia. Well, it had also a brand and a footprint within the study abroad system in the United States. We had people from Barnard, from Georgetown, Illinois, Yale, many, many places, take Oregon State courses in the program and go with us to do either French or Arabic. Of course, we taught them also electives in Culture, and Environment, and Women's Studies.

**CP:** So you would make the trip too?

**KH:** Pardon?

**CP:** Were you physically there often during the study abroad?



**KH:** So, I was one of the two directors. Laura Rice and I were the resident directors. We taught the courses and electives in English, and we hired, we had the host school with whose institution we had OSU sign an agreement. And we flew to Tunisia one month or so before students arrived, preparing housing with families for them. We would pick them up at the airport and did all of the logistics for them, and we taught them the electives. Plus we took them, some of them, even took them to the airport for them to go home. And we did that—usually when we did the program we would be in Tunisia almost August to November or August to December. And we did that 2004 to 2011. [1:20:00]

**CP:** Okay, so it was a one-term program, then?

**KH:** Yes, ten weeks, and they'd get one year's worth of credits.

**CP:** Wow, that's a very significant personal investment on your part.

**KH:** Actually, yes, because we believed in the fact that the more exchanges there are, the better it is both for in-state and Tunisia. It's meaningful to us because we have a base there. We even donated the office space and other things, the cars, sometimes the accountant, because we had access to that. I had a car in Tunis. We have an office we borrow from a company, from my brother's company, because I render services. And luckily, we are planning on doing it again soon, which is fall of 2015, because the advisory has been lifted. There is no advisory about travelling to Tunisia.

**CP:** Well, that was my next question, was if you run into issues with politics in Tunisia or in the United States that have impeded some of the progress of the program? I'm wondering particularly about the Iraq War as that got going, if that caused any issues for you in Tunisia?

**KH:** Actually, [laughs] yeah, it's funny that you raise that, because we delayed our program in 2003. We were going to do it in spring, and we met in January. That was the pitched level of preparation in the media and the government about the invasion of Iraq, March 19th, 2003. We decided two months before that that it's not a good idea to take students in April, so we delayed it by a year. That's why we started in fall of 2004, not in 2003. Yes, so there was an issue with that. And luckily, when we started doing it, aside from minor incidents, pickpocket incidents, and sometimes actually harassment on public transport by jerks who behaved not civilly, we didn't have major incidents. We had a person get into a car accident and came out totally fine, which was like a miracle. I mean, she was staying up late and being driven home at 1 AM, and got in a roll-over. These are risks that happen, could happen in many programs.

What did not happen, which is good, is major incidents that would have shaken up the faith in the feasibility of the program. The program is totally feasible. The Embassy was very helpful. They gave us systematically safety briefings the first week after arrival. And the universities gave us great access, plus we crisscrossed the country in a minibus, because it's not only to learn Arabic right there and speak Arabic with a family, host family, it's also getting to know the landmarks of the country, the Roman ruins and Islamic sites, Islamic landmarks, and economic features, including oases, including the cave where I was born, and other places.

**CP:** [Laughs] Are there any standout memories that you have from eight years of doing this, things that you think about and make you proud from having gotten this program going and continuing it?

**KH:** Yeah, I think the unsolicited letters, occasional ones, that I receive by email from people who thank us for having provided the opportunity. We have people in various places. We have attorneys who were students; now they are attorneys in various places. We have professionals who—I mean, I had a graduate student from Georgetown University who had a Bourne Scholarship, and she did ten weeks with us, and continued six or seven months, more months, to do the requirements of the Bourne. I received an email—nothing against Georgetown, but this lady tells us, "Karim, the program in Tunis puts the Georgetown program to shame." Well, [laughs] I felt proud of it. I know they do Arabic very well at Georgetown, but this student, who is not like an eighteen or a nineteen year old who lacks experience, she is advanced, she has done Peace Corps, she is with the military. And she has assessed in her own way that the program in Tunis gave her more, in terms of mastering Arabic, than what she had done in Georgetown.

**CP:** Well, as we start to close up here a little bit, I want to ask you a question about the international students here at OSU. OSU has made a real concerted effort over the last few years to boost its international enrollment [1:25:00], and

has been pretty successful in doing that. I'm just wondering about your sense of the environment here for international students, and kind of the culture that you're facing and developing here at OSU?

**KH:** Well, in terms of statistics, it stands out that the two major regions that provide students to Oregon State are China and the Arab region. And that is actually important to keep in mind, because the system, of course, has changed with this arrangement of INTO-OSU, and academic pathways, and special new methods of taking care of international students, both those who are sponsored, and those who have their own resources to pay their tuition and expenses. My feeling is I think Oregon State can do more. There is a little bit of an issue with ghettoization a little bit, maybe, of the word ghetto, of having foreign students being clustered in one or two or three places. And there are many great initiatives done by various parts of Oregon State to multiply the encounters. Those are actually appreciated. I think still more can be done.

And the other feature, other parameter I should emphasize, is if we have 1,100 Chinese every year, or 1000, Chinese programs at Oregon State should benefit from that, because it goes—it's obvious. It's, as they say in French, "*Ça saute aux yeux*," it's blatant. If you have 1,100 Chinese students and you have a strong Chinese program, it goes without—it's obvious there would be fertilization, cross-fertilization, and a role for some of those students, and an increased number of American students taking Chinese, if Chinese tutors are available, and Chinese programs. Well, the same applies to Arabic. We have perhaps 600 or 700 Arab students from various countries. The top five countries who sponsor students at Oregon State are Arab countries, meaning secured scholarships. Oregon State does not have a headache with the payment; they are sponsored by their governments.

Well, it behooves our institution to consider that to take care of Arab students better, Arabic programs ought to be better. Really, it's obvious. And we are improving. The numbers have doubled this year, but the resources have not. And maybe in the future, the near future I hope, there will be a big step in strengthening Arabic. And I have taken some personal initiatives. I am dealing with INTO-OSU, with a green light from my school, to have conversations, and to find out together what our school and our world languages unit can do, not just do for Arab students, but with Arab students. And the good news is, INTO-OSU is interested, and one of our colleagues at the library, Laurie Bridges, has a role also in interacting and dealing with international students. I hope all of these little initiatives are going to coalesce and eventually, soon, I hope, strengthen both Chinese language and Arabic language.

**CP:** Well, my last question for you is just about change. It's sort of a theme we've been talking about throughout this project that I'm working on, this oral history project, change at OSU. You've seen a lot of change at OSU, and it's continued to change pretty rapidly. So I'm interested in your thoughts on how things are different now, and what you see as sort of the direction of the university going forward?

**KH:** Well, that's a difficult question. [Laughs] I will give you my two cents' worth, but it's difficult in the sense that I don't have enough access. I'm just an instructor, and I have done R and D projects and exchanges with Tunisia, and Morocco a little bit. I see, of course, distance education and e-campus, the role increasing greatly, and it's a good direction that Oregon State is taking. But also there are—I read quite a bit about higher education in general, and there are doubts about how traditional institutions will survive medium-term, long-term, particularly, in this onslaught of MOOCs and other massive ways of accessing, of transferring knowledge to people sitting in their corners around the world [1:30:00], without the need for structures like Oregon State or other universities. That is not my field of expertise; I just am a consumer of analyses and articles about it.

My feeling is Oregon State has done great strides, taking strides to adapt, and I think our status as a provider of online education is actually quite good, nationwide. Like 90 or 100 years ago, some people thought of Oregon State College as a cow college. It's a joke that comes back occasionally. We are not. We are a multidisciplinary institution. Of course, we are leading in Agriculture, Forestry, and Sciences and Engineering. We are leading in small islands of knowledge in Social Sciences and Humanities. We can do more. And because I am an instructor of languages, I feel like an American student who arrives here as a freshman, for them to be trained to become global citizens no matter what field they choose, if they do not master a foreign language, they will start handicapped in the competition at the global level, for being a citizen, for being a businessman or businesswoman.

So my pitch is actually for strengthening the Humanities in general. Efforts are being done. I'm not convinced that more cannot be done. More can be done, and there are obvious cases I mentioned earlier, about Chinese and Arabic languages particularly, but there are many other things. And we don't give up. As I said earlier, the persistent Arab, for the little

role I play, I will continue making my own little efforts to not bug anybody, but to participate in a productive way in the direction that I think Oregon State could take.

**CP:** Well, I wish you well. Thank you very much for sharing your memories and your time with us, I really appreciate it.

**KH:** Thank you.

[1:32:14]