Janet Nishihara Oral History Interview, September 2, 2015

Title
"Continuing Conversations on Diversity and Educational Opportunity at OSU"

Date
September 2, 2015

Location
Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary
In the interview, Nishihara discusses her family background and upbringing in rural eastern Oregon, noting in particular her memories of working on the family farm and of Japanese culture in her household. She then outlines the circumstances by which she enrolled at Oregon State University, her initial impressions of the region and of the school, and her academic progression in English Education and within the OSU honors program. In reflecting on her OSU undergraduate experience, she likewise notes her student job in the OSU library, her social life, and her sense of the campus climate faced by OSU's students of color in the 1970s.

From there, Nishihara describes her first job as a high school teacher in the Echo School District, her decision to pursue a graduate education, her return to OSU as a master's student in College Student Services Administration, and her initial contact with the Educational Opportunities Program. The history and activities of EOP at Oregon State is a major theme of the interview, with Nishihara sharing her perspective on the program's founding and leaders - including Larry Griggs and Miriam Orzech - as well as its reception on campus, and the ways in which Nishihara's own world view was shaped by her work at the office.

Nishihara also discusses her contacts with other figures who were important to diversity advancement at the university, including Phyllis Lee and Warren Suzuki; comments on her involvement with the Upward Bound program; recalls the creation of the Ethnic Studies department; outlines the history of the Difference, Power, and Discrimination curriculum at OSU; and notes a series of racially charged incidents that prompted change at the university.

As the session nears its conclusion, Nishihara recounts the founding of the Asian and Pacific Cultural Center at OSU and shares her thoughts on the role that the university's cultural centers have played over time. She then details her Ph.D. work, her assumption of a leadership position at EOP, shifts in EOP's mission, and her recent experiences as an interim provost. The interview closes with Nishihara's broader thoughts on diversity advancement at Oregon State and her sense of OSU's direction as it looks toward its sesquicentennial.

Interviewee
Janet Nishihara

Interviewer
Chris Petersen

PDF Created February 11, 2020

Website
http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/nishihara/

Transcript

***Note: Interview recorded to audio only.**

Chris Petersen: OK, today is September 2, 2015, and we are with Janet Nishihara in the Valley Library, and this is an audio-only recording. Janet is an alum of OSU and has worked here in multiple different capacities for quite a long time, so it will be interesting to talk to her about her experiences with OSU. But I'd like to begin with a discussion of your upbringing – you were born in Ontario, is that correct?

Janet Nishihara: Yes, in far eastern Oregon.

CP: But you were not raised in Ontario.

JN: I was raised on my father's farm about eighteen miles – between Ontario and Vale, which is another small town out there.

CP: So this is a very rural upbringing.

JN: Yes. I used to tell people, "oh, I'm from Vale," and then try to help them figure out what that was. And then I realized, I'm not from Vale; we grew up eight miles down a dirt road outside of Vale. So I wasn't even a city kid, like Vale kids were, which had 1,500 people, so I don't know if that qualifies as a city either. [laughs]

CP: Quote-unquote, city kid.

JN: Yeah.

CP: What were your parents' backgrounds?

JN: They were both second generation Japanese-Americans, my dad was born and raised in Utah, my mom was born and raised in eastern Idaho. And I found out just recently, they gave us more details about, they met through a friend. There was somebody who came over originally and immigrated with my grandparents, one set of my grandparents, who met the other set of grandparents and realized that maybe their kids should get together. So it was this weird, "we met on a ship from Japan, we should match you kids up," sort of thing. So it was not an arranged marriage but a friend of a family thing.

CP: Was there any family connection with internment?

JN: Some family connection because my mom had an older sister who was living in California and got out of internment by returning to the family farm in eastern Idaho. And my mom actually grew up not that far from Minidoka, which is the internment camp that was in eastern Idaho. Neither of them went to camp, but kind of strange connections in some ways.

CP: Tell me about farm life growing up.

JN: My dad's farm was mostly sugar beets, potatoes, onion seed, things like that. And for a lot of my growing up, I thought he'd just had kids so that he had free labor on the farm. And partially it was. We had a lot of irrigation pipes and sprinkler pipes and driving tractors around. We didn't have any livestock, so that was a little bit different. And around the Vale area anyway, there was a pretty big difference between farmers and ranchers. So the ranchers were a little bit more higher prestige class or something like that, and the farmers were just farmers. So that was kind of an interesting piece too.

I think it was a good way to grow up. The closest neighbors were a quarter mile away, there weren't a whole lot of kids to hang out with but a lot of work to do. I had an older brother, a younger brother, and then a much younger sister, so we hung out together and did crazy things on the farm and tried not to get hurt and tried not to get in too much trouble. But I started driving tractors and stuff about four or five years old, which nowadays, I don't know if that would be ok. [laughs] But it's what my dad had, right?

I remember him standing my younger brother in the pick-up – we'd be moving a line of sprinkler pipes, and my younger brother was too young to move sprinkler pipes, because he was too short to see over the crops. And so he would put him in the pick-up at the top end of the field, and put it into first gear, and my brother would stand behind the wheel and pretend that he was steering, and basically he was just going down this rutted road. And he said, "when you get to the bottom, it won't be a hill anymore, so it'll stop. And then you just turn the key off." And it was in first gear so it wouldn't move. So that's how he learned how to drive at like three years old or something like that. We got down there and he'd be waiting there for us, all proud of himself for having driven the truck.

CP: Were there aspects of Japanese culture in the household?

JN: There was quite a bit. My parents were bilingual and bicultural in a lot of ways – their parents didn't speak any English. By the time I was old enough to be aware of things, most of my grandparents had passed away. I didn't know my grandfathers much at all, one passed away before I was born. And then my grandmothers, one of them lived in California with that side of the family and the other one lived nearby, but she passed away, it must have been seven or eight, something like that. She lived near us on my uncle's farm. So their influence wasn't as strong and we didn't learn any Japanese when we were kids. I asked my mom about that at one point, I said, "how come you didn't teach us Japanese? That should have been easy." And she said, "you know, during World War II, people got put in jail because they spoke Japanese, so why do you need to learn Japanese? You're going to be American."

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But still these little influences – lots of stuff around the house and most of the food we ate was usually sort of Japanese but not completely. We only heard the language around Christmas or birthdays because there were secrets, or if there were family secrets going on, and then we couldn't understand what was going on anyway.

So it's an interesting mix of some culture and – oh, there were enough Japanese-Americans in that area that we attended the Japanese Buddhist temple, which was entirely Japanese-American. And there was a pretty close near-by Methodist church that was entirely Japanese-American, so there were a lot of us in the area. So we got most of our Japanese culture, any language we learned, was at the Buddhist church. But it was an interesting, when you look back on things, growing up being Buddhist and learning all the Buddhist things and chanting and all that kind of stuff, and then we would also celebrate Christmas and Easter. [laughs] So we would do Easter egg hunts and we asked a lot of questions like, "how is this Buddhist?" And people would be like, "this is American, don't worry about it." So it's an interesting idea – what's Buddhist? What's Japanese? What's American? I think we were different viewpoints than other people had.

CP: Looking back, do you feel like that community was pretty isolated? This is very rural and very far – extremely eastern Oregon we're talking about.

JN: In some ways it was because there were a lot of us in the valley, so at some point they sort of had to pay attention. And a lot of the farmers, I mean they worked really hard and they did fairly well, became onion processor people and had some businesses. But I know that growing up there was still, they would always say, "why aren't the Japanese donating blood?" We're like, "well, you do the blood drives in the Elks Lodge. We're not allowed to go in the front door of the Elks Lodge. So you want us to go in the back door of a building and then give you blood? That might not happen." So even when I was in high school, there was an Elks scholarship and they ended up rearranging things so that all of us went in the back door, because I couldn't go in the front door. And that was not that long ago. And people were like, "well, that's just the way it has to be." And you know, in high school I'm like, "yeah, whatever. You give me money to go to college, I don't really care what you do."

So there were odd things like that. I ran into a lot of people who said, "oh, the Japanese, we love having the Japanese here." There were stores, there were restaurants. The population's gone down since, but talking with my parents now, I realize all their friends are from church or are Japanese-Americans from the Methodist church. They know people who aren't Japanese, but all their friends are from there. So yeah, I think there is still long-standing isolation in that area.

CP: What were your interests as a girl, growing up?

JN: In?

CP: Just generally, beyond farm work.

JN: I had to take piano lessons, so it was like music lessons, things like that. I liked school a lot. I did 4-H. I didn't do sports because there wasn't a whole lot of sports for girls and you had to stay after school and ride the activity bus, and the activity bus was all boys and my mom didn't want me to do that. So not much sports. A lot of it was just, I think I talked a lot – I mean, I still do – with friends and stuff. A lot of it was just going home and helping out.

CP: Was school in Ontario?

JN: Vale.

CP: In Vale, ok.

JN: The bus we road, somehow we always ended up being the first on and the last off of the bus. So we would sometimes get on the bus an hour before we had to be at school and get off an hour after we left school. So kind of long days and kind of dusty, dirty roads. But the bus was pretty fun too, because we got to mess around on the bus. As long as we didn't mess around enough to get in trouble with the bus driver we were ok.

CP: So about how many people were in your class at Vale High School?

JN: I'm thinking around eighty-five, ninety, something like that. Not too huge. The whole school had about 300-some students. High school was fun, I had a lot of fun in high school. There were some Japanese there, but not a whole lot – probably about three in my class, four in my class. And they were all Buddhist. There were so many of us, I didn't know the Methodists. Even nowadays somebody will say, "oh, do you know so-and-so from Ontario?" And I think, "no, were they Methodists?" Because if they were, I didn't know them, because there were plenty of us who were Buddhist to get to know.

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CP: Was there a strong emphasis on academics in your household?

JN: Yeah. It was never, "are you going to go college?" It was, "you better decide which college you're going to go to and it better not be the University of Oregon," because that was where all the hippies went to school. Everyone smoked pot at the University of Oregon or something. So I only applied to Oregon State, I didn't apply to any other schools.

CP: Because we're clean-cut here?

JN: Yeah, and it was more conservative and that's where all the cowboys, you know, all the farm kids went to Oregon State.

CP: So you and your siblings were the first generation in your family to go to college, is that correct?

JN: Yeah. There were a few of us cousins in that same area of eastern Oregon, and we all came to Oregon State. I'm pretty sure.

CP: Had you been to Corvallis before you arrived to go to school?

JN: You know, the only time I'd been here was my oldest cousin came here and for some reason we drove through on our way to the coast one time. But that's all I remember.

CP: So you arrived in 1974, do you have recollections of your initial impressions of the university or the town?

JN: Some of the things that I remember were just things that were different from home, and I think that's just because dorms are structured differently. Vale has really bad water, so I came here and I thought, "this water tastes weird." It probably tasted normal but I was used to stuff that was, it's really minerally in Vale. And I remember thinking, "this food is not very good." They would have like, in quotes, Chinese food, and I thought, "I've never seen this Chinese food in my life before." I was so used to being around farm kids, and even if the kids grew up in Ontario or Vale they lived in farming

areas, so they were used to it. So coming here, that was kind of a shock of people from big cities that I felt like we had nothing in common to talk about. So I ended up sort of hanging out with the eastern Oregon kids. I was thinking about this too. I hung out with some other Asian-Americans, but that term wasn't even used back then. You were either Chinese or Japanese or something like that. So I hung out with a lot of other kids from eastern Oregon who we felt like we had something in common. I remember that.

I remember being amazed – my dad got me a bicycle with a flag on the back, which I got here and realized nobody else had flags on the backs of their bicycles. So I took that off. Going down to Fall Festival and thinking, "this is amazing that there's all this stuff." And you can ride your bicycle for a long time and never leave town. Things like that.

CP: How about the weather?

JN: Oh, you know, the winter – I had heard all this stuff about the rain and everything, knowing that it didn't rain very much in eastern Oregon, and I came prepared. My mom made most of my clothing most of the time, and she had made me a coat that was made out of heavy wool but, we didn't realize, absorbed water like crazy. And I thought the first winter wasn't too bad except for that coat, which I wore all the time. I would wear it in the library and it would just drip on the floor. And I thought, "well this isn't too bad," I was talking to somebody and they said, "we're in the middle of a drought." I thought, "this is a drought? Drought in eastern Oregon means it never rains." So I had kind of a gentle introduction to Corvallis, and by the time it really started doing its normal thing I was used to it. Never touched an umbrella before I got here, so that was interesting.

CP: Did you have a good idea of what you wanted to study by the time you arrived? Or was that an evolution?

JN: Yeah, I knew what I wanted to do. My favorite class in high school was English, my favorite teachers in high school were the English teachers. And I never even had a discussion with my parents about my major because I don't know if they knew there was something like that. They just knew you went to college. And I became an English major which is not – by the time I graduated, I found out from my dad years later, he told his friends at church that he was going to have to support me the rest of his life because what kind of job was I going to get? And I liked being an English major. I felt more like being a college student in some ways – this is what college students do, you sit around and talk about Shakespeare. It made me feel more real, I think, as a student.

CP: Were there professors that made a particular impact in the English department?

JN: Yeah, there were some that I really enjoyed taking their classes and that sort of kept me in the major, for sure. I started out in a sophomore-level Shakespeare class not knowing what I was doing, and he was a – Jim Lynch was a big influence. My advisor was a big influence – he must have taught in the English department – but I spent a lot of time in his office just talking about stuff, and that was a lot of fun. And that probably influenced me to think, "oh, that might be kind of fun to do, just sit around and talk with students."

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CP: And who was this?

JN: Roger King. Roger King? His name was Roger, I forget now what his last name was. Yeah, so I had a lot of fun. When I look back on all the best practices in advising, maybe not so much, because we wouldn't talk about my classes. I would sit down with a schedule in my residence hall with all my friends and say, "ok, I'm going to figure out your schedule for you," because they didn't want to do it. So I sort of did that kind of weird stuff. So he never did with me. We just sat and talked about English and what do you do with an English major? What's going on in the world? And things like that. So that's mostly what I talked about with him. That was fun.

CP: And you were in the Honors Program as well?

JN: Yeah. Before it was a-

CP: Before it was a college. I'm interested in learning a little bit more about what that program was.

JN: Mrs. Meehan was the person who ran it. She was a very kind of stern woman with her hair up in a bun up on top of her head. So I remember that piece. What was the program like? I took some classes – you had to take some, like, colloquia classes. I don't remember what they were. Most of them had nothing to do with anything I was interested in but they fit my schedule. And they were small. I always had a problem staying awake in classes, so I remember I used to fall asleep – that was embarrassing – in the colloquia classes. One was about politics and I wasn't very interested in that. The ones I could find on lit were interesting. And then we had to write a thesis and I really liked my thesis advisor in the English department too – Faith Norris, that was Dr. Norris. She was really good. So that's mostly what I remember about the Honors Program. It was just some...I thought it would be good. And it was interesting, it made me take some stuff I wouldn't have taken otherwise.

CP: So it was sort of the focus on these small classes, colloquia, and just broadening your experience?

JN: Yeah, I think so. And then working one-on-one with a thesis advisor. Basically for my thesis, I took a paper I had written for Dr. Norris before. She said, "just take this and revise it," so it wasn't a whole lot of work. But she was great, I really liked her as a professor. She knew her stuff and she was very interesting. She was a woman in that field which, there weren't that many women. And she always had great stories. And she had the most amazing voice that just kept you enthralled, I don't even know how to explain her voice. It was just this nasally, loud, drawn-out, funny accent. I don't know where she was from, but she certainly kept us engaged. She would tell us these outrageous stories from her background that were just neat and cool and interesting about Broadway and being in England and things like that.

CP: And you worked here in the library?

JN: Yeah, I did, in the Materials Preparation department. That kind of saved me in some ways because my first term and second term, I couldn't figure out how to manage my schedule very well. I felt like I had a lot more free time than in high school, and if I have a lot free time I don't get stuff done – I just sort of dither and talk to people and stuff. Having a job made me be more thoughtful about planning things and getting my homework done and getting my reading done and things like that. Plus I met some pretty good people who still work at Oregon State who I still see every once in a while. And then my younger brother worked there, my younger sister worked there, so we kind of handed the job down from kid to kid in our family. It was fun. We were down on the very first floor, the basement of the library, mending books, sticking on what they used to call C-line – we would type the call number and then iron it on to the spine of the books. So that was kind of fun to do that kind of stuff. And then deliver them upstairs and have them processed.

CP: And you did that throughout college, is that correct?

JN: Yeah, from my freshman year on. I even did it, I think, during one of the summers of grad school.

CP: You mentioned, when you arrived at OSU you hung out mostly with eastern Oregon kids. I'm interested in how your social life broadened over the course of your undergraduate years.

JN: Yeah, you know – I don't know if it broadened. I stayed in the residence halls for two years and it sort of broadened during those two years, but then I moved into an apartment with my roommate and I think our circle of friends kind of stayed the same after that. When I look back, I didn't get very involved on campus. I was involved in like a sophomore women's honorary that I ended up advising later on, when I came back to school. But I was not very involved on campus; I just had this real close-type friends, most of them who I met my first year in the hall.

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CP: Did you have any particular hangouts? Or was it mostly at you apartment?

JN: Mostly at my apartment. The cultural centers weren't here – at least the APCC wasn't here. Mostly my apartment and Moreland Hall – which was where all my classes were – and the library. That was kind of it.

CP: You mentioned the APCC wasn't here yet, I'm interested in getting a sense of what the campus climate was like for students of color back then.

JN: When I look back, I wish I had paid more attention back then. Sometime during my freshman year, in the mail, I got a survey for students of color – back then it would have been "minority students" – to fill out. I think it was early on my freshman year. And my recollection is I gave it to one of my friends to fill out. And now I'd be horrified, since sometimes I help get those surveys out there. Because I think my identity at that point was trying to fit in as much as possible, and to sit down and even think about "what is it that makes you stand out here at Oregon State?" it wasn't what I wanted to do. I did have friends who were Chinese-American, but they were from The Dalles, so basically eastern Oregon. So we had some similar experiences that way. And one was in Education and Education was one of my areas too. And the rest of my friends were either from our floor or other people I met from eastern Oregon. So I'm kind of embarrassed that I didn't fill out that survey, but I think, "what was I thinking back then?" I think a lot of it was, "why should I fill this out? I'm no different from anybody else."

CP: Do you think that was a fairly typical attitude – this desire to try to fit in more than explore your identity – at that period of time?

JN: I don't know. For me, having grown up where I grew up too, we were pretty solid. In some ways we were sort of raised to – this is going to sound bad – we were sort of raised to believe, "hey, we're better than other people." So why would I think that anybody was going to look down on me? I mean, I knew that was going to happen, but there was also a part of me that was like, "fine, go ahead." And I think I felt better being looked upon for being a farm girl than for being – I didn't want to be looked down upon for being Japanese. So I sort of picked where I was going to be, that identity, I guess.

CP: So it sounds like it wasn't a climate of hostility. It was just kind of doing your thing.

JN: Yeah, I think so. And there were quite a few Japanese-American kids from Ontario – not so much from Vale, because it's so small – but Ontario area on campus too. So there were a few of us, if we really ran into something, there was somebody we could talk to and we could catch rides home with and stuff like that. So I was unaware of hostility – I'm sure it was here – but I either didn't pay attention to it or sort of tried to stay out of those places.

CP: Well you finished up here and your first job was at the Echo School District which, for those who haven't been there, is a small town. And I am gathering you did a bit of everything during these two years that you were a teacher there. Do you want to tell me about that time period?

JN: Yeah. The reason I got the job is because the superintendent of the school, this newly – they had merged, they had unmerged, so it's sort of a newly unmerged school district – was a guy who was my high school chemistry teacher. So I always tell students, if I hadn't behaved in high school chemistry, I wouldn't have gotten my first job. And they're like, "really?" "Yeah, you never know." My dad always said, "you never know. You gotta behave because there's always somebody there who knows your family." And I thought, "yeah, yeah, yeah." But there's always somebody around, especially in eastern Oregon.

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So yeah, I ended up being the assistant volleyball coach, because the volleyball coach was a guy and he couldn't go in the girls' locker room. I ended up being the cheerleader advisor and I know nothing about cheerleading. I ended up being the yearbook advisor, I knew nothing about that. I ended up playing my flute in the band, and then sometimes driving the band bus to go to football games. Yeah, just all sorts of stuff.

And we were almost all new first-year teachers, and it was a struggle. The school had merged with their rival school for three years and what we finally found out was the parents had told the kids from Echo, "you be as bad as you can without being suspended. Because this merger is not going to succeed." So then, three years later, we get them. And so they had learned these great skills on how to be really subversively bad in class, and we were all first-year teachers not knowing what the heck was going on. We found out, part way through my first year I was just talking to some of the students, and they said, "well, we assumed you all flunked out of college, so your punishment was to teach here." We're like, "oh good, thank you." [laughs] "Do you want to see my diploma? I actually did graduate from college."

So it was a real struggle and part-way through my first year I thought, "I think I made a big mistake." I liked being an English major, did not like the teaching part, didn't think I was very good at it. It was a different eastern Oregon than the one I knew growing up too. When I first moved to town, I couldn't move into Echo because there was no place to rent there, so I moved into Stanfield. And I was in Safeway or something, some store there, and people kept coming up behind me and saying, "oh hey, you must be the new English teacher in Echo." And I'd say, "yeah, I am," and I'd think, "how do you know this?" And finally I asked somebody, "how did you know that?" They said, "there's a new Chinese teacher and we're all supposed to see if you actually speak English." I thought, "well, you're being honest, thank. And really?" [laughs] So it was interesting. It took them a while to stop asking me and stop being real amazed at how my English was, because there are so few Asians in that area at all. And most of the Asians they know are like the Chinese family that runs the restaurant or something like that.

So that was interesting. It was a hard job because there was so much to do and the school was so small I had the same kids sort of all day long. And we had seven different classes a day to teach, five days a week, and I had like nothing prepared. I didn't have a storehouse of lessons plans or anything. It was like, "here's the book." So I spent the next year and a half trying to figure out how I was supposed to get out of there gracefully and not just running away.

CP: Had you taken coursework in education at OSU?

JN: I had and I'd done student teaching, but it was here in Corvallis High School and very gentile and very supported, and I never actually had a class all on my own. So yeah, I was not prepared in any way. Even here though, when I was doing student teaching, there was a kid who would not look at me when I was working with him. And I finally asked my supervising teacher, "can you find out what's going on?" And she talked to him and he said, "oh, my grandpa told me if I looked her in the eye, she would put bamboo stakes under my fingernails." And I'm thinking, "really? This is 1978, are you kidding me?" So even in Corvallis there was odd things and I'd think, "this doesn't make any sense to me." Echo didn't seem that bad, but there was still – there was just bad in general.

CP: Something that did occur during this time period, which seems to have been a pattern for many years in your career, was going to school while you were working. So you started taking grad courses at the U of O and OSU during the summers, is that correct?

JN: U of O one summer and OSU another summer, so separate summers.

CP: What was your focus?

JN: At U of O, I got admitted into the master's in English lit program, so I was taking – I had a blast, but I wasn't sure what I was going to do with a master's in English lit. And here I took some classes to help prepare me for the CSSA program, College Student Services Administration. Like a psychology course and things like that.

CP: So you decided at some point that you wanted to pursue that?

JN: Yeah, I was halfway through the master's at U of O, wasn't getting any funding, I didn't have a TA or anything like that. So I was doing loans and actually qualified for a lot of grants, because we didn't get paid much as teachers. And I saw a flyer about the College Student Services Administration program and realized that people actually got paid – I don't know why I didn't know that – but got paid for working with college students. So I thought, "oh, this sounds more like something I'd be interested in," and then applied for and got admitted into the CSSA program here.

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CP: And so at that point moved back to Corvallis.

JN: Yes. It's comfortable here and I know Oregon State, and I really like Oregon State. So it was nice to move back.

CP: Can you tell me a little bit more about that program? You completed the degree in '83, but we'll talk about the program first, the CSSA program.

JN: It's a master's program – at that point it was a Ph.D. also – to prepare people to work with college students, basically. So they talked to us about student development theory and organizational development theory. The topics haven't changed all that much over the years. And I had an assistantship with the Educational Opportunities Program, because when I was at U of O, I had a work-study job, because I qualified for work-study, and I worked with their EOP program doing academic counseling with the students – I think it's more of a TRIO program there, I think it was federally funded. So I had that background so now I got a job here doing a similar thing at Oregon State with the students in the EOP program.

CP: Yeah, we'll talk more about that here in a second. You actually had three different jobs, it looks like – or three or for different jobs – when you were pursuing the master's degree. You worked at EOP, you worked at Admissions and Recruiting, and you did some of the same work at Western Oregon.

JN: Oh, that was an internship. Yeah, that was interesting, because we needed to do an internship and I didn't know where I was going to work, so I wanted to get different college experiences. I walked into their Admissions Office – and I thought I wanted to do admissions orientation stuff – I walked in their Admissions Office and it happened to be a going away party for somebody in their office, so I walked in like at 8:00 in the morning and at 10:00 they said, "well, we're all going to lunch, so answer the phones." I thought, "wait, do you have something?" And they said, "there's catalogs right there. So if students call and they want to come to Western, just give them the information." I'm thinking, "what information? I have no idea." And the internet did not exist at the point, right? So I sat there thinking, "if I took the phone off the hook, no one could call." [laughs] I think I only answered a few phone calls, but I still thought, "wow, maybe a little bit of information would have been better. Somebody's gonna be really made that I answered the phone." I learned a lot from them in terms of a real small college admissions office and I thought, "I don't know if this is what I want to do." I really liked the possibility of a more on-going relationship with students. I think it would be really hard to work with them in high school and see them get admitted and say, "hey, good luck in college."

CP: And that was reinforced – you did similar sorts of work at OSU during this time period, didn't you?

JN: Yeah, I did some stuff with Admissions and-

CP: The New Student Programs as well.

JN: Yeah, that was fun. My advisor for the master's program was the head of what's now New Student Programs or maybe it was then, and so I worked with the summer orientation program, which was a lost smaller then. But that was a lot of fun too, doing that kind of really intense summer work is fun.

CP: Well beginning in 1984 you started to settle in, it looks like, at the Equal Opportunities Program-

JN: Educational Opportunities Program.

CP: Yeah. So I'm interested in the background to the program up to that point, to the extent that you knew about it.

JN: It started in '69 after a walkout of black students on campus in protest of how they were treated on campus. So the Faculty Senate at Oregon State created the Educational Opportunities Program, it had a small number students, and by '84, when I started as a grad student and then when I started on the faculty, we had a fairly large staff, a fairly large number of students, a lot of intense one-on-one. We had a lot of classes we were teaching. So it was a real vibrant program in a lot of ways and it was a lot of fun. A lot of crazy stuff happened, when I look back I think, "oh, maybe we shouldn't have done that either." You know, times change too.

There was a lot of one-on-one, a lot of real intensive work with the students, with a lot of students that, I think, without the program may not have come to Oregon State and if they had come they might not have stayed. Just because there was some pretty intense times on campus, especially for the African-American students. At some point, and I don't remember the year, somebody burned a cross on the lawn of the BCC. Things like that. And I think people like to think Corvallis isn't like that, but it is. And the students that I think, in my recollection, were connected to a fraternity across the street or something, they said, "well, we didn't know what that meant." And I'm like, "how could you not know what burning a cross on the front lawn of the BCC means?" "Well, we were drunk." "Oh yeah, but still, that's the place you chose." So things like that.

[0:35:32]

And I think there was a whole lot of needing a place to feel safe and I think EOP served that role too, as a place where people could feel safe. Come by and just hang out and talk. Talk about things that were bothering them or things that were getting in their way, and have somebody who could say, "oh ok, that's happened – you're not the only one. It happened to other people, it happened to me. Let's figure out how to solve it." So that's what I really liked about EOP, there was a lot of – I know I grew a lot in terms of understanding people from different backgrounds, and figuring out what does that mean to me? And are there students I'm going to focus my work on and reading and that kind of stuff? Or a little more general. So yeah, a lot of questions. That was a fun time.

CP: So it sounds like one of the real thrusts was retaining students. Were there other, I guess, thrusts?

JN: Yeah. We had a recruiter and I worked with him a bit. We did like financial aid workshops that we'd broadcast across the state. We did a lot of what's now called diversity training – we worked with state people, we worked with the police department here in town, we did a lot of training with Housing and Dining Services, the RA staff, and different units across campus. So we did a lot of diversity training, just to sort of get people talking about it and thinking about it. I was also involved with things like the creation of the DPD program, Ethnic Studies and things like that. The university saw a lot of growth, at least in units like that, to be part of that.

CP: How was EOP received on campus?

JN: You know, it depended, I think. Sometimes we were seen as the people who were trying to remind people about things they didn't want to be reminded about, and trying to call people to task on things they didn't think were important. So that whole, "if you quit talking about race all the time, it wouldn't be a problem." Its like, "no, the problem is we're not talking about it enough." I think we were a thorn in people's sides. I think there were a lot of assumptions that we were helping the students too much, and if we're helping them that much, that wasn't fair to other students. So I think a lot of these perceptions, especially over the past few years, have changed quite a bit.

In my recollection, we used to have a more hunker down mentality – "they're gonna come after us, so we better protect ourselves." One of those things my parents used to say all the time, it's a Japanese saying I think, of the nail that sticks up gets hammered down. So that's always in the back of my head, "do you want to be the nail that sticks out? Because you might get hammered down." But sometimes that's what you've got to do – you've got to be the person that's out there doing that and you might get hammered down, but maybe someone's paying attention to that too.

CP: How did you arrive at that point for yourself, where you started to make that decision or develop that sense of your identity as the nail that's gonna stick up?

JN: My boss – I had only two bosses in EOP – and Larry Griggs, certainly he was a nail that stuck up. He was like the thorn in people's side sometimes. And he was always there saying, "no, you need to pay attention to this kind of thing." And we had different styles, but I think the supported that, and to a certain extent he expected that out of people, to stand up and do something about things. So that gave me a lot of support in being able to do that, in a different way and usually with different populations and different goals, because mine was more making administrative change. And when I look back on it, that's not what I was thinking, you know, "how can we add an Ethnic Studies department? How can we change the Bacc Core requirements? How can we have an office that's responsible to remind us of all this stuff?" Because at EOP, our job really was to support students that were in the program with what we now call academic counseling and coursework. It wasn't to make change in the university. So he also allowed me to do some of that stuff too and he didn't say, "hey, that's not your job." So I appreciated that piece.

[0:40:11]

CP: So he was a mentor for you.

JN: Yeah, in a "Janet being stubborn I don't need any mentors" kind of way, I think. Yeah, he was. Certainly a role model. And he supported me when other people might not have. Not in a really overt "I support you, Janet" kind of way, but as sort of, "hey go to this meeting. Tell them was EOP is all about." I felt like he trusted me to be able to do that.

CP: Did you get to know Miriam Orzech at all?

JN: Yeah, I did. She was my first boss there.

CP: She's somebody that comes up a lot in various interviews that I've done. I'm interested in knowing more about her.

JN: Yeah, she was an interesting boss. She used to scare people because she could get really focused and she would come out – I've heard of other people who worked in our front office and her office was just behind there – and she would come bursting out of her office and people would sort of jump like, "oh no, what's going to happen now?" But she kept us going. She had us doing things in support of students and all the students that the program supported, and she didn't have favorites, it didn't seem like to me. For me as a new professional, I felt supported and I felt like she would tell me if I messed up, which was scary but good at the same time.

Sometimes when I look back I think, "oh, I wouldn't do that." She used to tell students at our new student retreat, she would tell them, "if you need something, you keep asking until you get the answer you want." And I would think, "oh, wow. I would have phrased that differently." So "you need to talk to somebody who's going to give you this straight and figure out what's right, because what you want might not be exactly what's best for you. And a lot of us, looking at our own lives, might not even be the best person to judge that all the time." I'd say it hopefully better than that. But I didn't like the message of "just keep asking until somebody tells you the answer that you want," because he may be just telling you an answer that you want and it might not be the best solution. But she was good, she encouraged students to come in. She set up a program that provided real solid support for the students, and that people wanted to be part of. People wanted to work for EOP, so that was a good thing. We had a lot of staff back then too, a lot of graduate students.

CP: Somebody else who I'm sure you intersected with was Phyllis Lee. Can you tell me about her and the impact that she made?

JN: Yeah, she was on the Board of Visitors and then she became the director of Multicultural Affairs. I knew here before that, I had her come – I would teach classes on multicultural issues and she would often come to class and was always very impactful with the students. She's the one who told me what her understanding of what a Chinese fire drill really was, because I'd never thought about it. Have you ever heard that? What she told me – and I have heard this from other places too, not just from Phyllis – but she grew up in the Chinatown area of Portland, and there's a lot of stories from sort of the Wild West of cowboys getting drunk, going to Chinatown, and burning buildings down. So part of where the idea of a Chinese fire drill – because I always tell students, "so what's a Chinese fire drill?" "Oh, you pull up to a red light, everyone jumps out of the car, you run around the car, you jump back in." I say, "why's it called a Chinese fire drill?" "Oh, we don't know." "Well, that's because people used to set fire to houses and watch when people ran out." And they're like, "oh, maybe we won't do that anymore." [laughs]

So she had a lot of information that she would impart to me and to students that was helpful. She's always been helpful with me in terms of, if I have issues I need to talk to her about – and she wasn't in EOP, so if I had EOP issues or if I had, "ok, there's this Asian American stuff I don't think I have enough background on, what should I be doing?" So she's been good being ahead of me in that way, sort of leading that area, and also working more, not just Asian Americans, but more diversity in general. And I'm so glad she's still around. And she'll tell it to you straight too; she'll be very nice but she'll also tell you exactly how it is, and I appreciate that because it gives me a different insight into things.

CP: Were there other colleagues from this period of time that were particularly important to you?

JN: Yeah, I'm sure there were. A lot of people in EOP. Warren Suzuki was in the Education department and Phyllis and I have him in common, because he helped both of us on our dissertations. There's a lot of people that were very supportive along the way. I don't think I remember feeling particularly, like, all by myself or alone or anything. Lots of real helpful people, and not necessarily just people of color either. Dick Thies in the College of – people's faces pop up. People in lots of different colleges, lots of advisors out there who were very good and supportive of what we did, and if I had a question about a student I could call them up. And even if they were a head advisor and I was just this little EOP counselor, that was ok and they were fine with it.

[0:45:43]

CP: What was the Upward Bound program?

JN: Upward Bound is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Education that works with high school students, first generation/low-income high school students, to get prepared for and access college. So the work I headed with them – that was a crazy summer – they needed somebody to be like the head resident in the dorm where the Upward Bound kids were staying. And they came to campus for eight weeks, ten weeks, something like that – for a long time – and they were like free from their homes. And most of them were low income. I'd never done housing that way before, being the person in charge. And we were down in Sackett Hall and I had whatever the head person's apartment was, and it was wire with alarms to all the external doors. So in the evenings when they were supposed to be in their dorm rooms, I'd have to turn on the alarm and every single night the alarm would go off in the middle of the night. Because somebody needed to go smoke or somebody just needed to go out into the bushes with their girlfriend, boyfriend, whatever.

One night it went off and I thought, "ok, who left?" So I sort of waited – and it was like in the middle of the night – so I waited up for a while and so I was sitting out in the lobby when the students came back. I said, "where did you guys go?" They said, "we went to the beach to watch the sun rise." I said, "you do realize the sun sets at the Oregon beach." They said, "yeah, we figured that out in the middle of the night." I'm like, "oh my gosh."

So just crazy things, just running around. It was a lot of fun, because it was high energy, lots of student contact. There was also, we were trying to think of things to keep them occupied and being from eastern Oregon there's no blueberry farms or strawberry farms or anything like that. I said, "let's go pick blueberries, that sounds like a lot of fun." And they were like, "we came to Upward Bound so we didn't have to pick blueberries this summer." I'm like, "I'm an idiot," and I'm thinking, "yeah, I kind of am an idiot." But then they turned the tables and they said, "well, let's go play in the sprinklers." I'm like, "no, this is what I came to college for, so I didn't have to work in the sprinkler fields." And they were like, "well, sprinklers are fun." I'm like, "no, they're not fun." [laughs] So we had a little bonding, sharing moment over things we didn't want to do anymore. I said, "see, you should come to college, you won't have to pick blueberries any more in the summer."

So it was fun and it was real interesting. I worked real closely with Dale Simmons in the Psychology department, and he taught me a lot about – what did he call it? – psychological drought or something like that. Kids who hadn't been really exposed to a lot of things, because we were like, "hey, let's try a different food." They'd be like, "no, I don't eat that kind of food," and a real resistance to trying different things because it was all scary stuff. And by then I was out of college and was in grad school or something, and I was like, "no, you should try this stuff." And so how do you negotiate that where people are open to being exposed to different things; at least give it a try. So that was a real learning experience for me – how do you do that?

Because even in Echo when I was teaching, I taught like the senior-level English class. And we raised money, we drove them down to Ashland in my own car, which was probably not a good idea. But we tested it out first by, we went and ate Chinese food in Hermiston. And they were like, "oh, I've never eaten Chinese food before." I'm thinking, "how can you – in America there's a Chinese restaurant in every single small town in eastern Oregon." So we did that. As we were driving to Portland they said, "you know, I've never been past Boardman." Which was, how far is that, like ten miles or something? It's not very far. So they've never been further west than Boardman. So going to Portland was amazing to them, going to Ashland was amazing and seeing plays. We stopped by Lloyd Center and went ice skating – they went ice skating, I don't ice skate. We went to Rose's Deli, back in the day, and we were sitting at different tables – I remember one of the students going, "Ms. Nishihara, what's a bag-el [pronounced to rhyme with "haggle"]?" I'm thinking "bag-el, I don't know what a bag-el is. Oh, bagel! Bagels are good." We didn't talk about food. So just the exposure to things.

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Upward Bound was fun in the same way because I was that kid that only ate my mom's food, only wore the clothes that she made for me. And it's real scary, because you don't want to look stupid or uncultured or something, so how can you provide those opportunities for students to get that experience and then be able to do others experiences? Because the last thing I want to see with these kids is to be stuck in eastern Oregon again. Unless they chose to, and that's fine. People go out and do something and then come back and think, "nah, this is where I want to be," then that's good. But just to be stuck there because you're afraid to go someplace else, I didn't want to see that.

CP: You mentioned your involvement with Ethnic Studies and the founding of that department, I'm interested in getting the back story behind that.

JN: Linc Kessler was the big mover for that. He now works at, I think, UBC, up in British Columbia. But he was the big pusher who said, "we need to have Ethnic Studies." He was in the English department. And he gathered a few people – Judy Li is still around, she was there I think, or maybe Hiram, her husband, was there, I can't remember. And we would sit around his laptop and write the proposal and we also would talk to our friends about, "hey, we're working on this proposal for Ethnic Studies," and start doing a lot of pre-ground laying work before we sent the proposal to the Faculty Senate. And I'd been involved with Faculty Senate and Larry, my boss, had been involved with Faculty Senate, so there was quite a bit of knowledge about how they did things back then.

And by the time we got it to the Faculty Senate, we'd had town halls and open discussions, and there was a lot of pushback from certain areas saying, "we already teach this stuff." And we're like, "well, show us where you teach it." And they're like, "well, we don't teach it right now, we'll teach in the future," you know. So it was like gentle pushing to say, "how are you doing this? Because it's a different philosophy, it's a different pedagogy, and it's a different focus, and our students of color need this. And our white students need this to understand the world better and to go out of Oregon." Because there was a lot of talk about, "well, these Oregon kids, they just don't understand." Well then, we should help them have a better understanding of how that works.

There was also somebody who taught Latin American history, is the example I usually remember. Somebody taught Latin American history and he got up in one of our open forums and said, "you don't understand. I don't have enough time to teach the important stuff already." We're like, "well, what's the important stuff." "Oh, it's what the men were doing?" We said, "well, what about women in Latin America? He said, "they weren't doing anything." We said, "well, were they at least raising families?" "Well yeah, but that wasn't changing Latin America." So there was some of that level of pushback on that, and I don't think we ever convinced him that – he was determining what was important, or his field was determining what's important. And how do you ignore women? So if you're going to ignore women, of course you're going to ignore indigenous people and the poor and things like that. So he was resistant the entire time, because he felt like we were infringing on his right to teach his classes the way he wanted. We said, "no, we're going to add different classes." "Well, then they'll take your class instead of mine." We're like, "well, life's hard. If students want to take this class instead because it tells it more real and more truthful to what really was, then yeah, I don't know what to say."

But for the most part there was a lot of support, and when it got to Faculty Senate it got approved. Same thing with DPD – there wasn't a whole lot of pushback on some of this stuff, which amazed the heck out of us, because we figured there was going to be an argument on the floor of the Faculty Senate.

CP: And you got some money to fund it too.

JN: Yeah. It's interesting too because, looking back, some of the stuff that happens on campus, some of the programs that get created like EOP, what's now Diversity and Cultural Engagement – it used to be ISS and before that it was MEO – were created because of student. Ethnic Studies wasn't, DPD was. Faculty, we can talk all we want about stuff and we can make proposals about "we need this, we need that," but if students catch the attention of the administration, a lot of times they'll say "do something," and then we can slide in what it was we thought it would be important to do.

CP: Let's talk about DPD. You wrote a book chapter on the history of DPD at OSU – Difference, Power and Discrimination – what did you learn in that research?

JN: It was co-written with Joan Gross, who understood the history in a different way. We were both involved in the beginning. I don't know if I'm real happy with that chapter because it does go into a lot of detail about things – I tend to write things that are more story based or "these are the big things that I remember." I remember the meetings that we had and how we made decisions about things; I guess that maybe that's all in the chapter, because we were giving the task of creating an affirming diversity category for the Baccalaureate Core. We were like, "affirming diversity – what does that even mean?" And they wanted it to be one big class of like 600 people in Milam Auditorium and then we'd have a small break-out. Well, nah, that's not gonna work. So what we ended up creating was a lot more, pedagogically, a bit more with what we thought was going to be a good learning for students. And that got changed over the years and people got hired

to teach the classes that hadn't gone through the training. But the basic parts of it are still there and are stronger than they were before.

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The DPD faculty training, they used that as the model for this new STEM Advance grant that they got. So the deans went through a modified version of the DPD training, and now all the people involved with the grant are going through that. So it's kind nice that it's a model that's being used for other things too, that faculty development piece. So I think that was a big piece of it, because that's pretty intense stuff. Originally it was like three weeks long in the summer, six hours a day, tons of reading. I just recycled – threw away – the readings from that first summer and it was four four-inch binders full of readings, the material for that class. It was massive. And people did it. And there was a lot crying that went on in there, there was a lot of bonding, there was a lot of sharing of things that we weren't proud of. So it was pretty impactful and impressive in a lot of ways, that whole DPD thing. We've had a lot of directors over the years and it's changed a lot.

CP: This was a curriculum that you helped develop?

JN: Yeah, it was based a lot on women's studies, because there were a lot of Womens Studies faculty involved. So a lot of the readings came from that area. Some of the stuff, sort of more writers of color, that we had studied. It's always interesting to start something from scratch and sort of create what you want out of it; that's pretty fun. You don't get that opportunity very often.

CP: And you said that this emerged out of a student protest?

JN: Yes. Which one was it?

CP: It wasn't the Fred Milton one, I don't presume.

JN: No, that's the EOP. I think it was – oh, I think I know which one it was. There was an African American student who was walking through the housing quad down by Buxton/Hawley, that area. And there was a white student standing on the sort of, not the balcony, but the overlooking area, and he was drunk, and he called him lots of names, called this African American student lots of names, and then tried to urinate on his head. And I mean its like, "really?" And there was a huge student protest, a lot of students making demands. There was a group called Together Everyone Achieves More, and one of the demands was a course that all students at Oregon State had to take in order to get some background in this. And some of the courses have been great – the ethics of diversity class, the philosophy, a lot of students went through that and talked about how it changed their lives and changed how they saw the world. Some of them, not so much – had to do with food or something like that. But I think it's made a difference.

There's sort of a, it feels like there's sort of a taken for granted piece about DPD now and a lot of students bypass the requirement by taking U.S. history at a community college or something like that. Or they get AP credit, because they don't want to have to take the DPD course. I think, "wow, no, this has the potential to make a big difference," and if you're going to work in L.A. or New York or pretty much anyplace outside of Oregon, wouldn't it be good if you actually understood some of these issues? The other push back we had was we always wanted to focus on the United States and people were like, "well, things happen other places too." Yeah, but we're working with – the majority of our students are Oregon students and the vast majority are from the United States, so we also don't want to dodge issues in the United States. Because we do that all the time, pretend like America is wonderful which, there's some good things, but there's a lot of things that we need to talk about. So we've always pushed back on that piece.

CP: This incident, that happened in the mid-1990s and led to a walkout of classes. I know this because I was in school then.

[0:59:58]

JN: Oh you were! OK, yeah – is this the same one? Because there were two or three. Because there was a big rally on the front steps of the MU and they made CNN or something like that, and we got calls from all over the country. That rally was right after Larry Roper started at vice provost for student affairs, or relatively soon, and President Risser either had just started or was about to start. And the story I heard, that came down through the grapevine, was "do something about

this." So it was like, "ok, we'll do something this." And that may have been the one that resulted in the creation of the Minority Education Office. They're all sort of jumbled in my head.

CP: I'd like to know more about your involvement with the cultural centers here on campus and the role that they play for the students at OSU.

JN: My biggest role has been with the Asian-Pacific Cultural Center, which started like in the mid-'90s. Until then there was an Asian Student Association then an Asian American Student Association that Sally Wong in the Counseling Center started up. And we didn't have a place. The first time we had a lot of discussions about needing a center, because at the point we had three centers and it seemed odd not to have a fourth center, considering how things are in America. And so we had a lot of discussions with administration, some with administrators who identified as Asian-American, but there's a real difference. One was from Hawaii and he said, "I don't understand why students need this," even when students were saying, "we need this, we need this." And he said, "I don't understand why you need this, this doesn't make any sense to me." So having some of those conversations. So he was not the advocate we thought he was going to be, for administration, but he didn't stand in the way.

So the first place that we had was a little office in Snell Hall that was probably, maybe like ten by ten or something. Its like, "oh yeah, sure, all the Asian-American students can fit in this room." And it's funny because the first coordinator that we had – I've forgotten her name – was a white student who grew up in Taiwan. So culturally she was very Taiwanese and spoke Chinese very well, she was fluent in Chinese. So it was interesting that that was the first student that was involved with that. And it's grown since then.

The creation was, again, Sally Wong from the Counseling Center and Warren Suzuki, who was in Education. I can't remember if Phyllis was – Phyllis may have been involved with that. But it was kind of the three of us really just being that steady drip of water, saying "hey, we're not going away. What are we doing this year about this?" So that's a lot of it. We didn't have protests or marches or anything, we just kept bugging people until they said, "fine, ok, we'll give you a place." I think they thought, "oh, we'll give them this little office in Snell and they'll be fine." But then we started figuring out, "ok, how are we going to find a different location?" And pretty soon we got the house over on Jackson Street, and now we have the great new facility over there right by Weatherford.

CP: Yeah, an outgrowth of the capital campaign, all four of the cultural centers have been completely rebuilt.

JN: Yeah, it was amazing, and that wasn't really the communities lobbying for it. I think the Minority Education Office did a lot of work in terms of that. But it was the president in a lot of ways saying, "we need to do this." And to me, now, if somebody's going to come to campus, I think we need to show them the cultural centers. Because they also represent a real interesting piece in that we have a lot of students and the largest growing population of students on campus are students that identify as multiracial. So the fact that we have four or five, counting the ECC, cultural centers, what does that say about people who identify as more than one?

So I think that's the big thing we're working on now. I was just in a meeting with a group of people working on Pacific Islander issues. So do they go – a lot of them go to the Native American Longhouse, because they have similar political needs and personal needs. A lot of them go to the APCC because there's also that piece there. Luckily they're kitty-corner from each other, they're real close. But there is something interesting about having the centers in a time when a lot of the universities are consolidating their centers and making one multicultural center. So it's interesting. And everything makes a political statement.

Our big thing with the APCC was getting it through the Historic Registry Board. I don't know if you heard the story about that – Phyllis probably said something.

CP: No.

JN: Oh, ok. Because the center part of campus is on the historic registry, we had to go in front of the board with the structure of the building, and it didn't pass the first time through because basically – they didn't actually say it – but what they meant was it didn't look Asian enough. We're like, "we're not sure what the means." Because the architects were really good about saying, "ok, we looked at different rooflines from the Pacific islands and from different parts of Asia,

so the roofline is this," but it didn't look like what they thought was Asian enough. And my whole thing was, "we're not putting dragons on the outside of this building." That was my big complaint. And I knew it wasn't going to happen. But now my complaint is, the gate that they put up, everybody calls it the Japanese gate. And I'm thinking, "no, it wasn't supposed to be," but I understand why people think that. So they all think that's the Japanese building, so we're going to have to do something to camouflage that gate, I think.

[1:05:41]

CP: Well you completed a Ph.D. in 2002, so this is again returning to this theme of going to school while you're working full-time. I'm interested in what that was like; I'm sure it was plenty of work.

JN: It was. I had a lot of support from my boss, and at that point there was also pipeline money that bought out some of my time while I was taking classes to go to school. They called it the Wednesday Program down at the University of Oregon – Educational Policy Management. So all the classes were on Wednesdays, so I only missed one day of work. And there was one other person from Oregon State, two other people, and we would commute down together. So we found ways to make it work out.

I had the courses I'd already taken in my master's – history of higher ed, legal issues in higher ed – so it didn't seem that different and I found some good professors down there too who were real interesting and I learned a lot from in terms of research. I took a lot of courses in community college structure and those were really interesting too. So it worked out somehow. I didn't finish as fast as I would like to have, but I finished.

CP: And the doctorate is in educational leadership. Did you have a particular focus?

JN: Yeah, higher ed administration, because I knew I wanted to stay in higher ed. The main reason I did that is because I knew at some point Larry Griggs was going to retire, and I didn't want the lack of a Ph.D. to get in my way if I wanted to be the director of EOP. I didn't know then if I did, but I wanted to be prepared.

CP: Well it happened, right? In 2009.

JN: Yeah. So that worked out. They couldn't say, "oh, you know, we really need someone with a Ph.D." Well they could say that and I could say, "well, here's mine."

CP: Well you led EOP for five years, 2009 to 2014, can you give us some context on that period of time and the achievements of that period of time?

JN: It was a time – we had downsized a lot from budget things and we lost a lot of people to retirement, so it was a lot of trying to readjust to that and what does that mean in terms of student population? What does that mean in terms of what are we doing and what do we not have the capacity to do? So that's my recollection of that time. A lot of that was trying to make sure we still offered the courses that we needed to offer, and so where was there wiggle room? And a lot of that was in the academic counseling. And we have some people who worked there quite a while, so there's a lot of knowledge there and a lot of capability of people there to do what we need to do. And we ended up being able to hire somebody a couple years ago, we hired a brand new academic counselor, which is always fun and cool; they bring new ideas.

And now we've added this Meyer Program that provides outreach and support in the cultural centers, which brings us closer together with Diversity Development that runs the cultural centers, so that's always been a good thing. We've always had sort of an informal relationship with them – we're on advisory boards and things like that – but now we have a structural connection with them, which I think is good for the students. It's kind of odd because we're in Academic Affairs and they're in Student Affairs, but I don't really care. [laughs] We were in Student Affairs at one point, they moved us to Student Affairs and then they moved us back to Academic Affairs. It didn't change what we did, it just changed who we reported to and what kind of information they wanted.

CP: Do you have any sense of a shift in the needs of the students that EOP serves? You've been associated with it for thirty years.

JN: Yeah, well certainly the populations have changed. Not too long after I started in '81, we started really getting a lot of Vietnamese refugee students, and at that point the university was trying to figure out who was going to support these students. Most of them were adults who had escaped South Vietnam and had come to the United States were going to come to college. And a lot of them already had college degrees in Vietnam that weren't acknowledged here in the United States, so a real different type of population. But what's now International Programs said, "they're not international students. They're not here on visas, so we don't know what to do with them." And EOP, I was real happy about, stepped up and said, "ok, yeah, we'll support them." So then we added a lot of English language classes, a lot of English language tutoring, because these were extremely bright people and just willing to work harder than anybody I've ever seen, so we needed to provide some of that support in order to help them to do what they needed to do. So I always thought that was good of EOP to be able to do that and be able to shift in that way.

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Because of the way the population is now, we tend to have more Latino students. But we also have the CAMP program, so that's a really good support for their first year in college, because Oregon being the way it is, a lot of the migrant population is Latino in Oregon. So EOP has started to shift a little, because we realize our numbers are really low in terms of black students, Native American students, they're really flat at Oregon State. There hasn't been any growth in those populations, hardly at all, and the retention rates for those groups are much lower than for other groups. So we're going to try and focus in on those two groups, multiracial students, and also we're starting to work with students who are undocumented, because we have the new tuition equity program.

So there are students coming to Oregon State that yes they get in-state tuition, but they can't get federal financial aid. You know, what a bind to put somebody in. So we're trying to make sure we can provide access to those students, to say, "yes, we realize that you're in a bind, but clearly you have a huge amount of motivation to go to college, because you're here even though there are a lot of obstacles in your way, and we want to help you try to figure out how to decrease some of those obstacles." So that's our focus for this year, are those groups. That's the first time we've really had a focus on certain groups. It feels good to me.

CP: Have you engaged at all with Athletics?

JN: You know, we used to work a lot more with Athletics, but since Academics for Student Athletes has gotten really solid and really strong, we have sort of backed away from doing any academic counseling. We do provide access to our courses for the students who especially come through their BEST bridge program in the summer. So we have done some more in the past, not so much now, but we're certainly there for them.

We also have a group that's probably about four or five years old called – maybe its six years old – Council of Academic Counseling, kind of a strange title. But that's a group of people in EOP, SSS, CAMP, and Academics for Student Athletes who do academic counseling. We don't do academic advising, we do a little more hands-on, high-tough, more constant contact with the students. Things outside course registration and other things that academic advisors do. So having that group to do professional development with, to share ideas with, has been real helpful too.

It seems like we spent a lot of our time in the past having people say, "well, you're not academic advisors, don't call yourselves...well, you're not counselors, don't call yourselves counselors," finally we said, "this is what we are, this is what we call ourselves," and no one has pushed back on us saying "you can't call yourselves that." So claiming identity has helped a lot too and saying, "this is what we have in common." And that group has now provided a couple really solid learning opportunities for other people on campus. There was a summit and, I forget what they call it, talking about not first year students but what happens to students after that. And they're getting kind of like, "so what are you guys going to do next?" which is kind of cool. So instead of hiding from people, saying, "hey, this is what we do. Let's talk."

CP: How about the INTO program, have you worked with them much?

JN: Not much because we've always, from the start, EOP was set up as not working with international students. We have off and on, but not in any numbers at all.

CP: Well you made another shift in 2014, you became interim associate provost for academic success and engagement. I'm interested in knowing how this came about and the work you've done in that position.

JN: And that's, I've changed back. It was my boss' position and Susie Brubaker-Cole became the vice provost for student affairs, so it left an opening while the upper administration decided what they were going to do with that position. And I looked at that and I thought, "huh, that would be a fun thing to do," and I sort of just ignored it. And then I got asked to be on the search committee and I thought, "wait, wait, wait, wait, let me think." I thought, "no, let me try," because it all seemed like stuff I knew and I thought it might be kind of fun – I knew it was just for a year or less – fun to see what things look like from the fifth floor of Kerr Administration Building. And so I put my name in and got the position, which was kind of fun, because I hadn't given a job talk, I hadn't changed my resume in a long time. And it was, I learned a lot about different positions.

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I learned some odd things – there were people who would come up to me and say, "oh, Janet, I've always been meaning to talk to you," I'm thinking, "I don't know? What?" I think, "wait, ok, it's the title." And for a while that irritated me, I thought, "wait, so the only reason you're talking to me is because I have a different title." And after a while I thought, "oh, that's ok, if you'll talk to me now." And there were people who would say, "yeah, sure, of course we'll do that," and I think, "well, that was the title, but ok, I got what I needed for the students" or something. So that was real interesting to sort of have that little piece of that – as little as I'm ever going to get, I think.

But it's sort of continuing now in some ways. I get invited to meetings and I'm thinking – there was a meeting the other day – I said, "am I here as a position I no longer have, which was interim? Or as director of EOP?" And they're like, "well, both." "Well ok, but I'm not in that position because it doesn't exist anymore. So what you got is Janet, director of EOP, and that's how I'm going to look at the work." "Well, ok." So I think it gets me into places they might not have thought of including me before which is ok too. Because there was a conversation about something or other and I was the person in the room who was thinking about it from the students' point of view. They're like, "oh yeah, that would be good." And I thought, "yeah, that might be good, to look at things from the students' point of view." It was fun. It was fun to be in Kerr and I made some of my students go up there because they had never been above the second floor in Kerr. So they were like, "oh, there's a fifth floor!" "Yeah, there's a fifth floor." So that was pretty fun; the students of color, getting them up further than the second floor was good.

CP: Well as we start to conclude here, I'm interested in your broader thoughts on diversity advancement here at OSU; where we're at right now. I'm gathering it's probably pretty different depending on the communities that we're talking about – it may be different for students versus faculty and staff.

JN: Yeah. You know, for a while we had a pretty strong vibrant faculty of color group, which has gone dormant now for a couple of years. And it was really sort of going dormant for a few years before that. Because for a while it was – and I want to help it revive – but for a while it felt like it was, "gee, Janet wants us to have this club," and that's not going to work. And there were a lot of people who would say, "yeah, we really need that group," but they wouldn't be able to come to meetings. Which is kind of sad because at one point the president invited us to a thing at his house every year, because he felt like we had a voice that he needed to listen to and he needed to be able to tap into us. He hasn't done that in a while because he's not dumb and he realizes that we haven't been very active.

But I worry because there was a hiring thing last year, in particular, where most of the funding went to new faculty who were going to work specifically on student success and/or work with students of color. So there's more new faculty of color or faculty who specifically their area of research is students of color or diverse groups, and there's nothing here for them. And I worry about, especially the new people – I mean, if I need something, I'll call somebody that I know. How are they supposed to be able to do that? And how are they supposed to know that they need that? So that, to me, is a disappointment that there isn't a stronger faculty of color group. There's a women of color group that sort of meets sometimes, and it's always a lot of fun, and people say, "yeah, we should do this again." But no on has the time to organize that kind of thing. It's tough on this campus.

When I look around at African-American faculty, I think I know maybe three. That's not good. We have twenty-five to thirty thousand students on this campus and the odds are they're never going to see an African-American faculty member in front of the classroom. That's not right. So that's a thing that worries me. I think we've lost ground in that area.

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I think that there's a lot of good things that are happening but I think there are a lot of places where we haven't paid enough attention and haven't really grown or provided support networks or anything like that. And I think, for a long time – I was moving files around and realized there were probably ten different work groups, subcommittees, councils, where the suggestion was to create what a lot of places call a chief diversity officer, a vice provost for diversity, something like that. Who that's there job is to keep an eye on things – how are we doing? How are the students doing? And we've always been told, "oh, there's not enough money for something like that," or "we don't want to grow the administration more than we have to." So I wish that we would find the solution to that. Because there's a lot of us who work on things, but on a real individual classroom-level, like we'll teach classes or something or work with the student groups. But there's nothing that says this is serious to the university. So that does worry me too. There's some great people here, we just don't have anything to pull us together.

CP: What do you think the climate is like for students these days?

JN: I think for the students that get involved with clubs or the cultural centers, I think it's really good. I think they find support. I work some with the Hmong students, the Cambodian students, and it's a fairly small group but they feel like they have people here. I think if students don't/can't/won't/don't find out about/don't feel welcome at these, I think it's tough. Even students who say, "I grew up in a white community, it's no big deal," every once in a while, if I continue working with them, they're like, "you know, something's missing and I'm not sure what it is," and we have to try to piece that out and figure out what it is. And a lot of times its involvement in some sort of community where they don't feel like an outsider to the community. Because as much as they feel welcome in their fraternity or honorary society or something like that, for some of them, for a lot of them, there's still this feeling of "I don't know if people think I belong there."

And, you know, it's predominantly white, the town's predominantly white. I told a student the other day, an African American female student, I said, "you should not put your baseball cap on backwards because if you drive around in town you're gonna get pulled over." Students tell me this all the time, because they think you're a guy, you're a black guy driving around in town. So of course they need to pull you over to see what you're up to. She said, "ok" and then she tried it. She said, "I believe you, I tried it. I took my baseball cap off," and she looked more female and she didn't get pulled over for weeks. She put the baseball cap on and she's like, "the next day I got pulled over!" So do you make a statement about that? Do you just not wear baseball caps? You have to make those decisions all the time. When you walk in the store do you walk around with your hands up in the air so people don't think you're stealing? And that's not a good way to live.

CP: On a broader level, a question that we're asking everybody is to lend their thoughts on the direction of OSU as it heads toward its sesquicentennial in 2018.

JN: I think my cousin was here – that cannot be right – was she here when it was the centennial?

CP: 1968.

JN: Yes, she was. God, it doesn't seem like it was that long ago. [laughs] I remember talking about that.

I'm glad that this project is going on because part of me was worried that the sesquicentennial was going to be honoring all these white folks that the buildings are named after – and some of them have kind of horrendous histories – and pioneers and all that kind of stuff, because it's so easy to forget the history of the black students who walked off campus, and the other students who put a whole lot of energy into making this a good place. So I'm hopeful that there's going to be an acknowledgement of all the pieces of Oregon State that have made it so good.

The Japanese-American students who protested when they were told to turn themselves in to go to internment camps and wrote a letter to the president of the university and said, "we are loyal American citizens." He said, "I know you are, but I can't do anything about it." So it's so interesting; to me those are the really interesting pieces of the student body

at Oregon State. And what does that mean to us as an institution that that happened? And he's right, he couldn't tell the federal government, "no, you're not going to take these students away," but then what do you do? And they rectified that to a certain extent because they did the honorary degrees a few years ago with the students, and they gave them to the families too. And I think there was a lot of appreciation on their part, but it took a long time for that to happen.

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So yeah, now I've forgotten what the question was.

CP: Just the broader direction of OSU.

JN: Oh, ok. You know, I love OSU, its warts and all. I think the general arc over the time that I've been here, it's been a good direction. It feels a little stalled now in terms of – students are going in a good direction, the cultural centers, I think, are great, we're moving forward on some of those things. It feels like we're not on all fronts working at a similar pace, but that's sort of how things are too.

CP: Well I want to thank you for this, Janet, it's been a lot of fun and I really appreciate you spending your time and sharing your recollections of a lengthy history at this place. Good luck with everything going forward.

JN: Yeah, well thank you. Thanks for the opportunity.

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