

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Monica Gonzalez

Interviewer: Genevieve Raduenz

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**Genevieve Raduenz:** Hello! My name is Genevieve Raduenz, and today's date is May 23, 2024.

I am interviewing Monica Gonzalez-Herrera through Zoom for the University of California, San Diego Race and Oral History Project. For the purposes of this inter- for this project, do you grant the university permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

**Monica Gonzalez:** Yes.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Okay, thank you. So let me start by asking, where did you go to school? And what is your current occupation?

**Monica Gonzalez:** Yeah. So I went to UCSD for my undergrad, and then I went to the University of San Diego for my master's degree in Student Affairs. So my area of work is basically higher education. When I was a undergrad at UCSD, I studied Human Developmental Sciences with a minor in Education. And so that kinda led me to want to pursue something in education. So then I went to get my master's, and so now I'm here working at UCSD for the Raza Resource Centro.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Very nice. And did you grow up in the area?

**Monica Gonzalez:** Yes, I'm a local San Diegan, born and raised, specifically my neighborhood is City Heights. So my family, when they immigrated from Mexico, they ended up coming to this neighborhood. And so my cousins are part of City Heights, and I continue to live in City Heights, and it's definitely a place that I call home. 'Cause, I don't know if you've been to City Heights, but it's very multi-ethnic, multi-racial. It's also a predominantly refugee immigrant community

which I really really love, because my neighborhood there's there's a long street called University Avenue, and within University Avenue through the neighborhood you can see the various different cultures being- not being shown but like the different cultures' stores and shopping centers. So you have like the Latinx, you also have the Asian Vietnamese community, you also have the Somalian community. So it's really really unique to have all these different races and ethnicities to be in one place and like having different mom-and-pop shops that are there for a really long time.

**Monica Gonzalez:** So it's definitely a place that I really call home, and one of the things that I really really enjoy is, you know, I can enjoy both my Mexican food and enjoy some Vietnamese sandwich, get some boba. And so, being able to just experience so many different cultures in one area is something that I'm very proud. Especially you hear, like, the different languages being spoken as well in the community. And so it's really dear, near and dear, to my heart.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Yeah, that sounds very special.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** So how would you say that where you grew up kind of impacted and shaped who you are today, and if that has affected that influenced what you wanted to study and pursue as your career in life?

**Monica Gonzalez:** Yeah, so kind of like I was mentioning like City Heights is a predominantly immigrant community. Refugees as well. So a lot of families are there are, you know, basically had to leave, or were forced to leave their home country to be able to create something new. And so there is a lot of first generation students.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And so again, like my family, we they settled in San Diego specifically City Heights. And so I went through school in City Heights. And in those times college wasn't something that was really like talked about but not until high school was when I was introduced

to the idea of college. But more specifically, it's like, what did you what do you want to do in your life, right? Like my high school Hoover, Herbert Hoover High School, really tried to kinda showcase like, what are some different pathways career pathways that you can take. So there were like different academies.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And I was part of the Health Academy, so it's called like “Faces for the Future.” I don't know if they change their name. But they basically have like a track for the students. So if there were students that were interested in like computer and like computer science like there was a track for them. So like the school kind of tried to divide us based on track. And I really wanted to be able to help others.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And so at the time especially in the Latin- in my family. It's very easy to kind of be like, “Oh, you should be a doctor,” just like oh, it's easy to be like, “Oh, you should be a lawyer!” So my family was like, “Oh, you should become a doctor” and I really liked the idea because I feel like having some experiences with my grandma, I felt like a lot of doctors lack the cultural awareness and cultural competency of what does it mean to navigate the healthcare system while being Latinx and not knowing English. And so I became very passionate about medicine and wanting to help others that I joined that academy to be able to prepare myself and have a better understanding of like what are the steps that I need to take to become a doctor. And one of and as a result of that I learned that I had to go to college, and so I was like, okay, I'm gonna go to college. But I don't know how to get here or what to do, because I'm the first in my family to ever navigate the the higher-ed system. So my school had a relationship, and I think it was a very early relationship, with San Diego State to be able to build a partnership and get students to be college ready. And so I was part of that group.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And I really really love that because I had like, college students were mentoring us and supporting us in like our application and our testing, so like the ACT and SAT, and kinda really like mentored me to be able to make college an opportunity for me. And so naturally, I was like oh this is really cool, this is really fun, I love how like you're helping high school students like myself.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And so that kind of started the the click that college is really important, education is important, but also it really highlighted to me that I really enjoy like helping others and others helping me. And so eventually down the line, I noticed that education is something that provides a lot of opportunities, not just for the students, but also for their families to consider college an opportunity. And so fast forward to when I ended up at UCSD, I was studying to become a doctor so I was majoring in Human Develop- Human Biology. I wasn't really happy with the classes. I really didn't like how cutthroat it was, and how difficult and challenging it was to be a Latina in STEM classes. And at the time, UCSD didn't have a high number of Latinx folks. So it was a very, very small community.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And I found it very challenging to be happy with what I was studying. Even though I went through Summer Bridge, which is a program that helps first-gen, low income, students of color to transition from high school to college. I still found it very difficult to find my place at such a big university. And I also had some personal struggles as well, and so that made school very challenging for me. And I had to reevaluate if this was - if medical, if becoming a doctor - was something that I really wanted to do, or was it something that I was just doing for the sake of my family? And it was very hard for me to come to terms that I wouldn't become a doctor or a medical doctor.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Mhm.

**Monica Gonzalez:** But it didn't it didn't mean that I didn't enjoy helping others, or that I didn't wanna help others become more culturally competent about different cultures and identities, or to make them more make people more empathetic and compassionate towards each other, right? Just how the medical field would do that. I found myself picking a lot of education studies classes in which I learned a lot and were the classes I enjoyed the most out of UCSD where we talked about culture, identity, language, the the policies that made it difficult for students to find community. To just - I just really loved EDS classes. And so that's when I kind of started considering maybe education might be something I'm more fit to be.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And at the end I ended up studying Human Development because it was a good kinda it was the best of both worlds where I could have both you know both the aspect of people, so learning about psychology, sociology, but also the aspect of biology, right? I had that biology background with my with like general bio and genetics and whatnot. So it kind of helped me blend the best of both worlds, of being able to not only understand how biology impacts people, but also picking that cultural social lens as well. And so that's how I ended up in my in my major and the minor classes, I mean, I took a lot of EDS classes. So eventually, I was like, let's just minor in it. And it was a little bit hard to kinda see myself wanting to find a different career path because I didn't want to be a high school teacher or a teacher. I just really enjoyed working with college students cause when I was a student I was working for Summer Bridge, too, and so I really like that part of working at a college. And so I was leaning more into something working as a university. But I just didn't know what.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And it wasn't really until after the pandemic, when I realized that the field of Student Affairs exists. And Student Affairs is basically that aspect of the college journey, that's not academics. So all the different things that you do, like your involvement, the community

centers that you're part of, the different jobs you're in on campus. All that outside extra curricular activities that add onto your college experience is what I was very interested in. And so I ended up getting a job at Revelle College, for their Graduate Orientation Assistant, and that kind of helped me set way into what is Student Affairs, and after that position I went back to school. The pandemic was still happening, but it was a little bit less. And so I ended up going to the University of San Diego to be able to get my degree in Student Affairs. Specifically Higher Education Leadership.

**Monica Gonzalez:** So I think it was a good blend for me to be able to join the two things that I really love, which is leadership and how to be compassionate and serve others with the college experience, right?

**Monica Gonzalez:** So that's kind of how I ended up in my field, and fast forwarding it to today, I feel like my experiences in my neighborhood and you know my experiences as a child led me to notice how important it is to be compassionate, to care about others, to see them as family, and to just be aware that we all come from different backgrounds. But yet we're still trying to achieve the same things. We're all trying to survive. We're all trying to, you know, be okay and navigate different challenges within ourselves, within our interpersonal relationships, and even with institutions as well, right? And so I really see it as a kind of global experience where we're all just trying to figure out how to fit in. And I see education as a lens to be able to do that, to give people the language, to be able to give them the experiences that maybe they wouldn't have. So like, for example, I'd never traveled abroad and I didn't travel abroad until I was in my grad program. And so that was something that was very unique that I don't think I would have done if I weren't a student.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And so, I again, I wanna emphasize how education really opens a lot of opportunities to people. And even though I didn't become a doctor, I am happy that I am part of the journey of other students who are considering to become doctors because it is a tough road ahead, and it's not an easy one, and I am just so happy to be part of their journey as they want to become that. And you know, even though I'm not a medical doctor, I would love to get my doctorate in the future and still have that doctorate title, because I know that education is so important, and the people who are part of that journey, for many people, open doors for others. And so that's what I want to do. And again, just the value of education, and how it can help people. And I also understand it may not be the road for everyone, but it sure opens a lot of doors for you.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Thank you so much for sharing that with me! That is incredible. It's really amazing to see how it's all connected and how everything with your education and where you ended up working and everything was all worked out, and how it was connected. I was wondering what if you could tell me about what drew you to the job with the Raza Resource Centro specifically and kind of like what your day-to-day looks like there?

**Monica Gonzalez:** Yeah. So as I briefly mentioned, when I was an undergrad here, I took on leadership positions. So like I was mentioning, like I was part of Summer Bridge, I eventually became their Resource Counselor. I think they renamed the position. I was also an Academic Transition Counselor for them. So I really really enjoy empowering other folks to reach their potential to kind of step out of their comfort zone, find resources, and so that theme of leadership and empowerment like kind of followed me. So then I eventually led Orientation Leaders, right? And even within the name it says "leader," right? So they're the ones who are guiding folks.

**Monica Gonzalez:** So I knew that I wanted to work with student leaders. I knew that I really enjoyed folks who are interested in empowering and building community with others. And so once I started my master's program, I was part of the Commuter Commons, and I also worked with again, student leaders, as a Commuter Assistant. Which is a role that parallels to RAs. So that's kind of when I realized that I really enjoy working with students. And I enjoy working with students who want to empower other people, build programming, build community.

**Monica Gonzalez:** So when I was looking for jobs after my master's degree, I really wanted a job that would allow me to be able to work with students and to build community. I didn't want something that was too administrative, which I would be on the computer for a long time. And so when I was job hunting, I found this job, and I've, again, as a student I have utilized the Raza Resource Centro services before. So I was very intrigued that there was an opening. And my position is the first one, right? It's the Student Life Operation Specialist, and it has "student life." So the "student" part is very intentional because I get to work with students, right? So when I inquired about the position, I learned about what it kinda entailed. So I was able my role would have me work with the interns and create programs and also be able to work with the student orgs. And so I was really excited that that component of working with student leaders and building community was there. And so I was like: yes, I want this job!

**Monica Gonzalez:** And and you know, and to this day, like, that's what I do like. I get to supervise the interns here at the Raza Resource Centro, which I'm very, very grateful to hear their stories, be part of their journey. Some students are in their last year, gonna be graduating, there's other students where this is like their first job and they're trying to, you know, figure out and build tools. And so it makes me so happy to be able to be part of the journey. And as an alumni



to be able to kinda give them advice and kind of show them how the university has changed, but also like what are some areas that are still the same, and maybe areas of improvement, right?

**Monica Gonzalez:** So to my day to day, I basically oversee the interns, I oversee their schedule, their tasks, making sure that they're creating programs for the community. Our interns have different specialty areas. So they focus on developing programs for that area. So for example, the Student Org Liaison develops programs for the Affiliate Student Org Program. The interns would develop programming centered around art and culture. And so their programs are all very unique, and I love that I can help guide them with that. But also I help support the operational side of the Centro. That includes, like the day to day operations. So making sure that you know the space is clean, making sure that it's operational, that people are welcomed, that there's people at the front desk to be able to greet as students are coming in. So I get that aspect, and it's also really nice, right? Because even though it's not people- as people focused, it's still very important, right? Like you want to come back, you want to come home - or at least I hope you do - but I know for me, you wanna come to a home that's clean, that's cozy, that makes you feel welcome and inviting, and so being able to create that physical space for students, for professors and faculty to see like that this is really a home away from home for many students is so valuable, because I feel like I have a responsibility to the community to make sure that we are doing okay, that we are functional that we are welcoming for everyone to make sure that they feel comfortable in our space, and to know that this is a safe space and that they can find community.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Mhm.

**Monica Gonzalez:** And as I was mentioning before, the last part is the student orgs. So a lot of my position is to figure out what the Student Org Affiliate Program is gonna look like. And so I'm still kind of developing. So behind the scenes, there is some computer time, there's a lot of

planning, I have to plan for trainings and whatnot. But I do really appreciate that a good chunk of my job is talking to students and talking to community and sometimes it's not even students. Sometimes it's professors or faculty or community members, which is also important to make sure that they also feel welcome, and that they have a connection with the Centro to then be able to help the students, right, like building that connection. And that's what I really really enjoyed, and I continue to enjoy it is, how can I help people be connected to then be able to help them build that community.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Mhm.

**Monica Gonzalez:** It's just I just really, I just really, really love my job. I really love my job. I'm really happy

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Yeah!

**Monica Gonzalez:** that I'm here, and that I can be back as an alumni and be able to see how the university has grown in some areas, and maybe where some areas are lacking. But overall, I am very proud of what the Centro has done and how much it has grown since I've been a student.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Yeah, thank you so much! I would definitely say you've done a wonderful job at creating such a comforting and inviting environment for so many different students. Just in the time that I've been able to spend there for this project, I can already see that. And so it's amazing to see how much you love your job, and that really reflects in how like amazing the community is at the RRC. I was wondering what you would say, I know that you kind of touched upon this, but what would you describe is like the RRC's mission and impact on campus?

**Monica Gonzalez:** That's a good question. I think it has definitely changed over time since I've been a student, but our main mission is to ensure that Latinx students are feeling supported both in their academic and social personal life. I think very oftentimes we forget that UCSD students

are very smart, very brilliant, which is why you got here in the first place. But also, how can we supplement and support that experience? You know your college years experience, right?

Whether that is taking you to a conference, giving you the opportunity to publish, like, I think the RRC definitely does a good job of supporting students, both in those different areas in their academic and social personal. Because, again, we want to make sure that you are building community and that you feel that you belong here.

**Monica Gonzalez:** Not just, you know, personally, but like getting to meet other Latinx students, but also making sure that your academics are succeeding, right? For many Latinx folks, English may not be their first language, and so they may have challenges in their writing, and or maybe the opposite, right? Maybe they don't speak Spanish as well, or may have some gaps in it. And still, how can we help you feel welcome and feel like you belong in this space, while also making sure that academically, you are networking with important people in your field in your field, making sure that you're making connections with professors - 'cause they can write you a good letter of rec. And I think, overall, the Centro has definitely been a key support and resource to be able to get students to that next step. So, aside from finishing, you know your time at UCSD and your time here in college, how can we prepare you for the next step, academically?

**Monica Gonzalez:** So I think the Centro has done a really good job of doing that of preparing and supporting scholars to then want to consider applying wanting to consider applying to graduate school, either in the medical, law, you know, professional. So I think overall the Centro continues to be a driving force in supporting Latinx students, and also, you know, staff and faculty. And I think in the future the Centro will continue doing this, and I do believe that the Centro will be a good partner or bridge for other campus communities to be able to support our Latinx students and faculty and staff. So I really see it more as like, becoming a really strong

bridge and connection to that Latinx community, and to be able to not just support our students but also to be able to support Latinx faculty and staff, right? I think. They also need some love as well, and sometimes they find it within our staff and within our students. And so I would love for that to continue to be happening and building more opportunities where we do have more Latinx faculty be able to mentor our Latinx students. So definitely, a big bridge and a driving force.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** That's great. I love that. Are there any stories or specific moments, from your time at the Raza Resource Centro, that you'd say like stand out, or prominent things you've taken away from your time here so far?

**Monica Gonzalez:** So when I was a student, something that I will always hold very dear is when I went to my first conference.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Mhm.

**Monica Gonzalez:** It was for the National Association for Chicana/Chicano Studies in New Mexico, Albuquerque. And it was very memorable to me as a student because I had never flown, I had never been in a plane.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Yeah!

**Monica Gonzalez:** I had never been out of California. And so being able to go to that conference with other Latinx scholars and have the RRC staff be part of that journey and help me, you know, apply to the conference, be able to get me the tickets to go there, kind of prep-talk me like, what can I expect in New Mexico, right? Where are some cultural differences between New Mexico and California, like I I was very scared because I've never been away from home, but as a student having that reassurance and knowing that the Raza Resource Centro really wanted to make sure that I not only succeeded as an academic, but also personally, like giving me that opportunity to travel is wonderful, and like after that it really made me feel more confident as a scholar to be

able to write and present in different conferences. And I think if I didn't have that experience, if I didn't have that attention and care that I don't - I wouldn't have - I think things would have been very, very different. And I love how even even even as a career staff that is still happening for many students, and I'm just amazed that we continue bringing in more scholars, more students to the National Conference. And each year the numbers are increasing. So I'm glad students are learning about it, that they're participating. And so I think that's like a memorable memory for me, because it really meant a lot to be able to have a the opportunity, but also have the assurance that like yes, I belong here as an academic and like I can do it much better than other people, or I could do just the same. So it was definitely a very empowering moment for me.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Yeah, that sounds very empowering. Thank you so much! And then my last question that I had for today was, you mentioned about implementing some new things, and I was wondering what you see for the future of the Raza Resource Centro?

**Monica Gonzalez:** Yeah. So I think, like I was mentioning more as a bridge for campus, and so I really hope that within the next couple of years I can help be part of that. And creating more partnerships and collaborations between different departments and colleges. I think I think that's there's still quite a few students who don't know that the Raza Resource Centro exists and the different resources we provide. So I really would love to be able to create more partnerships with the different colleges. I know that sometimes even within the colleges, it may be hard for them to find community or other Latinx students that they can connect to. So why not like bring them to the Centro, to be able to have, like, that you know, campus wide connection, right? So I definitely want to create more partnerships with the different colleges. And also, as I'm launching the Raza Resource Centro affiliates program which is called the Semillas Program. I really want to be able to really unify the Latinx student body to support the Raza Resource Centro in the

different programs that we do like graduation is a big event that you know I would love everyone to be able to volunteer at least once. When I was a student, I volunteered, and I got to see my friend graduate that stage, and that was very empowering. And then I eventually crossed that stage, too, right? So I just wanna continue developing more traditions and more of these memorable moments for folks to realize how important and impactful it is for their success here at UCSD. But also to realize that these accomplishments are not just yours, but also it means a lot to your families and your friends to see you graduate with an engineering degree, to see your grandma cry as you're walking down the stage, right? Like these are memorable moments that I don't think our community has enough, that I want to provide more opportunities to. And so that's a little bit of what I want to do. It's a big dream, and it's gonna take time. And I know it's gonna take a lot of allies. But I do hope that the Centro continues to build bridges with different places on campus, to be able to really provide the support for our Latinx community.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** I definitely think that that you will be able to do that! And I'm very excited to be able to see that. Because I mean I can see how much you love your job and the the care and work that you put into it. And so I definitely think that you'd be able to accomplish all those things, and more.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** So, yeah. I'm very excited for the future of the RRC, and with all of that I think that that is pretty much everything for today for the interview.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** I appreciate you so much. Thank you so much for allowing me to talk with you today. I really loved hearing everything that you had to say. And your stories are were very just so interesting. And I really really appreciate you taking your time to participate in the interview today.

**Monica Gonzalez:** Oh, yeah, thank you. Thank you so much for having this.

**Genevieve Raduenz:** Yeah, of course!