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Interviewer: Natalie Fabila
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MB: Marnie Brookolo
NF: Natalie Fabila

00:00:01

NF: Thank you! Hi, everyone! My name is Natalie Fabila, and I'm right here. With Marnie, and for those, for those, who they don't know who you are I would like you to introduce yourself. What do you do? And, who are you?

00:00:18

MB: Alright sounds good. Hi! Good morning. My name is Marnie Brookolo, the pronouns I use are she, her, hers, and I serve as the director of the *UC San Diego Women's Center*.

00:00:30

NF: Perfect. Thank you. I would like you to tell me a little bit more. Where are you from? What's your ethnicity? How was your childhood? Growing up like how was it for you?

00:00:45

MB: Sure. So I was born in New York, and my parents moved here when I was just a baby. So I grew up in San Diego, mostly in the East County area of San Diego. I grew up mostly with my mom, my parents divorced when I was pretty young and yeah, my childhood grew up mostly living in an apartment complex over in El Cajon. My mom wasn't able to work due to disabilities that she had. So we were pretty low income. It was just my mom and I. So, I am an only child and then I was the first person in my family to go to college. So kind of like that was, I think, a part of my childhood sort of growing up low income, growing up in a pretty diverse area in my apartment. Complex. You know, folks of all kinds of races and ethnicity. So I think that shaped my experience, too. My racial background is white and ethnic background is Italian and Eastern European. So I think a lot of my childhood was shaped by definitely my class background, and definitely kind of the experience, too, of changing schools at a young age. So I was. I went into the gate program, which was like gifted and talented education. So I think that also shifted my childhood trajectory a lot. I went to school with a lot more middle class folks, but, definitely my family and experiences were really different, so I think, always felt a little bit out of place but also feel like that definitely put me in the path to go to college.

00:03:02

NF: Thank you for sharing. I think it's like a very personal experience, because, as you said, like, it's very different. For, like other communities, and that's good that you can tell us, like your perspective of how it was for you growing up. Thank you. Moving on with the next question I would like to ask you, how do you feel working now in campus instead of being a student? Because I know you were an undergrad here at UCSD. I'm sorry there at UCSD [University of California San Diego].

00:03:35

MB: Yeah, I think it's really interesting just having the perspective of being an undergrad here at UCSD [University of California San Diego], I was an undergrad and I started in 1999 and then I started. I graduated in 2003, and then I started working here in 2005. So definitely have had a long history with UCSD [University of California San Diego] I think you know, when I when I first started here as a student like I, said I, as a first generation college student like, didn't really know what I was doing, didn't really know what I wanted to do. When I graduated I was involved in the *Women's Center* in the centers, a little bit as a student, and so that kind of sparked some of my interest, but didn't really know much about what it would be like to have a career in higher education. So now, having worked here for so many years. Definitely seeing a lot of changes in the university, I mean, in the physical campus obviously looks very different than it did when I was a student, but also, I think, in just the ways that you know, there's a lot of different resources that did not exist when I was a student. So I think there's still a lot of progress to be made at the university, especially as it relates to equity, diversity, inclusion, but also feel like I am having that perspective definitely, have seen a lot of positive changes in my time here.

00:05:20

NF: Thank you. Hmm, you said you were a student at UCSD [University of California San Diego] and I was going to ask you something. So what kind of like resources you see now that they were not in the past when you were a student?

00:05:39

MB: Yeah. So you know, when I was a student, the centers that existed at the time were, were pretty new. So the you know, *Cross Cultural Center* was the first center to open at *UC San Diego*. So that was in 95. The *Women's Center* opened in 96, the *LGBT Resource Center* 99. So as a student, those were the centers that existed for, for me and, and for other students here at the time. So since then, definitely, you know, new centers that have been established. So you know the, the *Raza Resource Center*, the *Black Resource Center*, the *Tribal Resource Center*. *APIMEDA* [Asian Pacific Islander Middle Eastern Desi American] Program and Services. The whole division of equity, diversity and inclusion did not exist when I was a student, you know, *Undocumented Students Services*, *Veterans Resource Center*. So I think you know a lot of additional resources to support students exist now than than did back when I was a student.

00:06:53

NF: I think that's really great. And I wish you could have like that in your generation, for, like the students who actually need the resources, and like the help they're with there for them. Thank you and for the next question. What was your major prior to become the director of the *Women's Center*?

00:07:16

MB: Yeah, so my major at UCSD [University of California San Diego], I majored in political science. I started with political science. Like, I said, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I didn't really know what it meant to pick a major. I was sort of interested in in politics and law. So that led me to pick political science. And then really through my classes and Marshall my classes. Doc, program. And Marshall really led me to explore social justice issues more kind of gave me language to describe a lot of the things that I had seen and experienced growing up, but didn't really have the language to talk about or understand, you know. So, thinking about things like power, privilege, oppression, all of that and that led me to become really interested in gender specifically, but gender, as it relates to race and sexuality, and that led me to add critical gender studies. So I majored in political science, in critical gender studies. And then, while working at UCSD [University of California San Diego], I got my masters over at USD [University of San Diego] in nonprofit leadership and management.

00:08:32

NF: Oh, that's really nice that you change a little bit like from political science to leadership. I think that's really great. Thank you. One question like out of the topic. What's your favorite food?

00:08:51

MB: Probably if I had to pick, I'd say Italian food like red sauce. Lasagna. But it's hard. There's a lot. There's a lot of other other things that I like. Sushi, big sushi fan. Yeah. But probably I pick pick Lasagna if I have to choose.

00:09:09

NF: Okay. Thank you. And for the next question. I'm sorry. Can we do a mini pause? Thank you.

00:09:19

MB: [Laugh]

00:09:20

NF: I'm so sorry.

00:09:21

MB: It's okay.

00:09:59

NF: I'm so sorry. That was my little brother. Sorry. I'm sorry.

00:10:06

MB: No worries.

00:10:10

NF: So for the next question, can you tell me a little bit of the origin in the history of the *Women's Center*? I think you mentioned it was created in 1995.

00:10:23

MB: Yeah, so it. The *Women's Center*, from what I know from different histories and records I've been able to find is that there was a student organization dating back to the early seventies. So, dating back to 1973, there was a student organization called the *Women's Resource Center* and that student organization had advocated for a staff women center for many years. They had a a small office and did. You know, at that time there was a lot less resources on campus, as it related to sexual assault and violence prevention, as it related to info and referral for different needs. That women might experience on campus. So they did a lot of that kind of peer support. And then, you know, after many years of advocating students from the *Women's Resource Center* and collaboration with staff and faculty who were part of the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women. Really began to push even further for a staffed women center. So in the early nineties there was a report that went to the Chancellor at the time, and then finally, after the approval of the cross cultural center, there was the approval to establish the *Women's Center*. So the women center officially opened as a staffed center with career staff and a budget. In 1996.

00:11:59

NF: 1996. Okay, thank you. So pretty much it was when the *Cross Culture Center* and the *Women's Center* were like open around the same time?

00:12:12

MB: Around the same time. So the *Cross Cultural Center* was approved first and opened in 95, and then shortly after the the *Women's Center* in 96.

00:12:23

NF: Thank you. And what would you say is like one of the main goals of the *Women's Center*?

00:12:29

MB: Yeah, I think. One of the main goals of the *Women's Center* is to be a space that supports women and other gender marginalized folks around gender identity around development providing resources for personal and professional support. Advancing equity, gender equity specifically on campus through the resources that we provide creating space for dialogue and conversation to really think about gender. Think about the ways that sexism plays out in on campus and in the world and giving all students an opportunity to learn and explore these issues while centering the experiences of women and other folks who might experience gender marginalization.

00:13:25

NF: Yeah, I totally agree. I was looking to the [unclear], to the I was looking through the website. And I think, it's really, really. It has so many resources the *Women's Center*. And I was seeing the events that you guys created. And what would you say is one of the biggest events that you being into the woman center like what's one of the events that it's always in your mind? And you always remember.

00:13:57

MB: Yeah, I'd say, I mean, we've had so many events that are memorable. Even just yesterday we had a really cool vendor fair that our students put on that showcased the crafts and other kind of things that were created by students. So that was really cool. So it was in my mind because it just happened yesterday. But if I had to say one of my favorite or most memorable events, it was definitely when we brought Angela Davis to campus. So that was early in my time here, that was in 2006. That was in celebration of our 10 year anniversary as a center. That was also the day before we moved into our space that we're currently in in the original student center. So it was just a very busy time. It was March, which is women's history month. So it was a very exciting event. We filled the ballroom and had to turn people away because there was so much interest in the event. And it was really cool to get to meet Angela Davis and to get to hear her speak, and then also we were able to have a reception with some students and other folks who got to attend. So getting to connect with her a little more. In that space, too, was really cool, after having, you know, read her works, and be being influenced by her, and knowing, you know, that she also is an alumni of *UC San Diego*. So that was definitely one of the most memorable memorable events we've had.

00:15:33

NF: Wow! Sounds really, really, great. Honestly.

00:15:36

MB: Yeah, it was very cool.

00:15:39

NF: For the next question, what is like the relationship between the *Women's Center* with other community centers in campus?

00:15:47

MB: Yeah, I think that our relationship has always been really strong, even when our centers first started. So like, I mentioned, you know. The *Women's Center* started shortly after the *Cross Cultural Center*, and shortly after that the *LGBT Resource Center* was established, and I think really early on the directors of the centers at that time realized that it was important to build community realized that. You know, our our communities are very interconnected, that our students have very complex intersectional identities, and that it's really important, and and really impossible to do our work in the ways that we wanna do it without building strong relationships. So you know, early on, we weren't even like the the center directors and staff did not even report into the same. You know, supervisor, the same administrative line. But we're able to still come together and and build community and really create this identity of campus community centers, and I think it was pretty unique. Especially at that time. But I think you know, on a lot of different campuses similarly situated centers were positioned against each other, competing for resources, competing, you know, for students to engage in their programs. And I think that our centers from the beginning really try to establish a coalition versus a a competition among each other. And I think that as we've grown, you know now we all are part of the Vice Chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion unit. Like I mentioned, we have other sibling centers that have been established over, you know, the last 10-15 years. So, really being able to continue that work of of partnering and being in community and being in coalition and and seeing that. We can't do this work dependent of each other because our communities are so interconnected. Many students, you know, frequent multiple centers. Many students have identities that intersect with multiple centers. So I think that collaboration and community building has has always been really central central to the work of the centers here at UCSD [University of California San Diego].

00:18:16

NF: Yes, thank you for for your information. For the next question. So, part of the Race and Oral History class in San Diego we had to be engaged with one of the community partners, and in my case I choose the *Raza Resource Center* and we had to went to like to see some of the archives of MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlán] and how they were asking for like extra resources to the University, and how they were like rejected, or like the help that they ask, and I don't know if you had the time to look at the archives that I sent you for the first one. Yeah, for the first one was the UCSD [University of California San Diego] 1995 admissions criteria. And I would like to ask you, how do you feel that only 178 foreign students were accepted at the time?

00:19:27

MB: Yeah, I I saw that. And I thought that you know, I mean, I had different observations. And seeing that one of the things I was struck by is just how much our campus has grown, just generally how many more students we have. I was. I was struck by even the language that was being used in 1995. I mean, I think now we would say international students. So even the language of of saying foreign was was interesting and and strange to me. Yeah, I wasn't. I mean, one of the things I thought about is, I know that you know, early on in the Universities foundation it was really important that the university serve the the communities and the people of California. So I wondered if if that was part of the low numbers of international students who were admitted. But I also yeah, was struck by how what a small number that was, and and and was curious about. You know what else was happening at that time that that led to that I think just that. Just generally, you know, looking at the numbers. I mean, the campus still has a long way to go to really representing California. And really you know, we're reflecting the diverse communities that that live here. But but I think that there's definitely been growth in diversifying the campus. So yeah, I was. I was surprised by by the low numbers of of students being admitted from from other countries at the time. And thought it was yeah, it was I. I I'm curious as to what the conversations were, you know, at that time. But I wonder if it was a a bias against, you know, admitting international students to prefer California students. But even looking at the students from California being emitted, seeing that it wasn't as diverse as it should have been. So. Yeah, I was. I was very surprised by by the low numbers of international students admitted at that time.

00:21:35

NF: Yeah. Actually, I was very surprised, too, because when I was in my first year, my freshman year at UCSD [University of California San Diego], it was still like hybrid.

00:21:44

MB: Yeah.

00:21:45

NF: Some classes were like remote, some classes were in person. So it was not like that many people in campus like they are now. So I feel like right now. I can see like how diverse is campus like it's like a bunch of like ethnicity, diversity, etc. Like, since, like. for example, back then, like in 2021. And I didn't sell like that much people. And now, like, it's the full diversity of.

00:22:16

MB: Yeah.

00:22:19

NF: For the next archive. It's a research based on like identity. And for the I don't know if you had the chance to look for this one.

00:22:33

MB: I was able to look at it. [unclear] I I think I've read it before, but I feel like it was!

00:22:37

NF: Oh! Nice!

00:22:37

MB: [unclear], but I have. I didn't have a chance to read the whole thing again, but I was familiar with it.

00:22:47

NF: On page 14 it says, like a few comments of like the student. And it's basically just saying, like, he doesn't feel like he's part of UCSD [University of California San Diego], because his identity as Mexican American. And I would like you to ask you, if your experience as director of UCSD [University of California San Diego] of the *Women's Center* has ever someone talked to you about disorientation of identity? If if they're like afraid of, like their ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, etc.

00:23:49

MB: Yeah, I think. You know, in my time here at the *Women's Center* I've had lots of conversations with students who have felt out of place at UCSD [University of California San Diego] because of their identity. Whether that be their ethnic identity, racial identity. You know, gender identity, sexuality, ability status, religion. You know, first generation status, and not like really knowing how to navigate the campus. I think you know socioeconomic status. I know you know. I think they're even. I remember feeling very out of place as a student. And you know this assumption that I think like, if you go here, you must have resources, or maybe your parents are paying for it, or those sorts of things that are not true for for many of our students, but are still sort of these assumptions that some people make so definitely like, I feel like, I experience that as a student, but also have talked to many students of the over the years who have felt yeah, out of place. I think often those students are driven to connect with spaces like the *Women's Center* or the other centers, to try to unpack that, to try to find community, to try, you know, find their place within this really large research university. So, yeah, I think that that definitely resonated as a conversation, I've had you know, lots and lots of times with many students over the years.

00:24:56

NF: Thank you. And yes, I also like I felt that way when I was a student like in my freshman year, because I didn't saw, like that, many people of like my community. But it was because it was not like fully in person teaching. So it was really hard for me like to connect with people.

But now that everything is like going back to normal is not like remote except now because sorry I don't in campus but, yes, I would say, that's like a totally change like plus COVID.

00:25:34

MB: Yeah, yeah, definitely, I think Covid made it even more difficult to to connect and and find community for sure.

00:25:44

NF: Yes, for one of the next questions I would like to ask you. In what ways does the center have changed over the years? How do you think it's different from the past? And yes.

00:26:00

MB: Yeah, I mean, I think one of the ways that the change the center has changed over the years is, you know, there, there definitely are a lot more resources on campus than when we were founded. So I think that's allowed us to be able to partner with other folks in ways that are different than they were before. I think as it relates to gender specifically, I think folks understanding of gender and gender identity. It continues to to change. And and folks, you know, connecting to the center who are identify with a wide range of gender identities. Right? So I think more and more students are identifying outside of the gender binary and exploring kind of what you know. What does feminism mean to them? What does you know womanhood mean to them? What does you know sexism mean to them, or gender mean to them? So I think the conversations that we have at the center. I think they've always been really intersectional and really mindful of the complexity of gender and identity. But I think that over the years that's even evolved even further to create even more space for for more identities and more ways for folks to really engage with the work of the center. So that's a couple of things that I think have shifted over the time that I've been here. And I think also, just like we're in, you know, even being in the space that we're in, you know, when we first started, we were in a small kind of bungalow building right? So being able to have the beautiful space that we are in now, is a big change, having a more, you know, stable staffing and budget is really important to the work of the center, and is something that evolved over time. So I think that, yeah, those are a few of the ways that the center has shifted over the years.

00:28:07

NF: Yes, thank you. The other day that I went to see you. It was my first time in the *Women's Center*; and it's really pretty. Honestly, it's really pretty.

00:28:15

MB: Well, thank you. I hope you'll come back and come back and hang out, or attend a program, or.

00:28:21

NF: Yes, of course everyone there is really nice. The staff is really nice, too.

00:28:26

MB: Yeah.

00:28:27

NF: For the, one of the last questions I would like to ask you. Is there any way that you can share with me any examples or stories, experiences from like different moments that you live as a student or like as a director that were really impactful for you? For example, it could be something like the protests, the recent protests here at UCSD [University of California San Diego].

00:28:56

MB: Yeah, I think I mean, there's been many moments that have been impactful. I think, definitely, the the recent protests have been impactful and seeing the impact on on students and staff of of kind of just that whole process and experience has been impactful. I would say, there's been many impactful moments. But I I definitely think back to being here in 2010 when there was a series of of racist incidents, particularly anti-blackness that was you know, had already been present on campus, but I think had hit new heights and led to [unclear]. A lot of activism that advocated for change, including the establishment of the *Black Resource Center* and the *Raza Resource Center*, and *Intertribal Resource Center* and and some of the other resources. So I think you know, that time on campus was definitely a very challenging time, and there was a lot of hurt and pain, but it was also inspiring to see so much change that came out of that and while I think this, the campus has a long way to go to really achieving our aspirations around social justice, around equity, diversity, and inclusion. I do think that, having the perspective of of being here for the time I've had I I do think that there has been change, and a lot of that change has been sparked by student activism and by coalitions of of students. And at at times students, staff and faculty. So I think that, yeah, I've definitely seen a lot of change happen because students, using their voices to push the university to do better.

00:31:00

NF: Yeah, I totally agree. I feel like the social. I'm sorry, the student activism it's a really impactful thing, especially what's happening around the world, and at UCSD [University of California San Diego] with the protests. Just like a quick summary, is there anything else you would like to add? Any anything that would you like to mention, or anything.

00:31:33

MB: Hmm

00:31:36

NF: Something that's missing.

00:31:38

MB: What was that?

00:31:39

NF: Am I missing something that you would like to say?

00:31:41

MB: Oh. trying to think if there's anything to add. No, I think that the work you're doing and that this class is doing is really cool, I think, trying to, you know, chronicle the history of the campus and different communities and different movements, I think, is really important. I think even, you know, having been here as long as I have been here, I still feel like I don't even know you know the full history of even the *Women's Center* right? Because there's so many different stories. And I've had the opportunity to talk to some folks who have been involved. you know, in the center, you know, from the eighties and from the nineties. And you know, obviously, at the time I've been here, but still feel like there's so much missing, and there's so much of the history of of all histories, I think, that are incomplete. So I think it's really cool. That you and your other you know folks in your class are are doing this work to try to create a more complete history of of campus and of activism and of the experiences of different communities on campus.

00:32:55

NF: Yeah, that's basically like the goal of the class which is like share with everyone like the race and or history based on like community. No, like something that you can listening to and you can relate to it. That's basically like the goal of the class.

00:33:16

MB: Yeah, it's really cool. I really, we're gonna be doing some work around the *Women's Center* and trying to kind of uncover some of the archives and history of the center. So this is great inspiration for that, too.

00:33:32

NF: Thank you. I think that's it. Thank you so much for your time, for your patience, and I think that's everything. Would you like to say something else, or.

00:33:45

MB: I think that's good. Just thank you, Natalie, for for your time this morning is really nice to get to meet you, and I hope to get to see you around the *Women's Center* around campus at some point.

00:33:56

NF: Yes, of course. Thank you so much. Have a nice day!

00:33:58

MB: Alright! You too.