NF: My name is Natalia Fernández; I am the Oregon Multicultural Librarian, a staff member with OSU’s Special Collections and Archives Research Center. Today’s date is May 23, 2013, and I am interviewing Nadia Alradhi, a staff member of the Native American Longhouse at Oregon State University. So let’s go ahead and get started with just some basic information. If you could state your name and spell it out loud.


NF: And what is your hometown, or where do you consider home?

NA: Estacada, Oregon. Should I spell that too?

NF: Sure.


NF: Okay. And what your age, your year in school, and your major?

NA: So, I’m 21. This is my third year at OSU but credit-wise I’m a senior and then, I’m Public Health, Health Promotion, Health Behavior.

NF: Okay, and are you affiliated with any particular tribe or tribes?

NA: Yeah, so I’m enrolled in the Karuk Tribe of Northern California which is a federally recognized tribe.
NF: Okay, well this next set of questions is about your work with the Longhouse. So if you could state your position with the Longhouse and what you do as well as how many years you’ve worked for the Longhouse.

NA: So I’m an Activities Coordinator here at the NAL and it’s kind of in the name…so I coordinate activities but I also, a large part of it is reaching out to others, other centers and collaborating with them as well. So you just basically you just come up with an idea for an activity and you make it happen, so it’s really cool. And this is my first year working for the Longhouse.

NF: And have you worked for any of the other cultural centers on campus?

NA: No, I have not.

NF: So then why did you decide to work at the NAL?

NA: So last year was my first year at OSU, 2012 was, and, oh no, I came here in Fall of 2011, yeah. And I was involved in Native American Student Association, after I transferred from the community college to here and I became the secretary of the Native American Student Association and we had our meetings in the Longhouse, the old Longhouse, and it’s kind of a big campus and it’s, I feel like it’s easy to get lost and the Longhouse was really welcoming and I spent a lot of my time there anyways so I figured I might as well apply. And I also wanted to help bridge the gap between NASA and the Longhouse; since I was involved in NASA and not really the Longhouse I wanted to help bridge that gap, yeah.

NF: So were your expectations, hopes for your work matched, surpassed, not matched?

NA: Yeah, so they were matched, and they actually surpassed my expectations in flexibility. They really take into consideration that you’re a student and that’s really nice, like if you’re like, “I need to study today” they’re, they understand that. And, it’s matched in other places, like, flexibility again in, “I have this idea, I want to do this” and they’re really accommodating of that. Um, I’m trying to think. With, with NASA I would’ve liked to see a better bridge built there so that I guess wouldn’t be matched yet but there’s at least a starting point for that relationship.

NF: Okay, so you’ll probably have, a lot to talk about here, as the Activities Coordinator, can you describe the projects, events, activities – we can start with Fall Term and then move on to Winter and Spring – that were especially meaningful to you or that you’d like to share?
NA: Yeah, so Fall Term was my first term and so we get to the training in the August and they’re like, “Okay” – oh, no, beginning of September, like, “Okay so, what activities do you want to do?” And it’s like “Well, this is my first time ever doing this, so do I really just get to do anything?” So, kind of all of my first events were really meaningful ‘cause it was “my first events” but, so I did a bow and arrow event and it didn’t get that good of attendance; so I think that it was important because it taught me how to plan a successful event and so I learned from that. And then my next event was a medicine bag making event and that was my second event and that drew a lot more people. And I think it’s because the location was easier to find, and the advertising was better, and I think people actually just had genuine interest in too, not that they didn’t for bow and arrow, but I learned from my first event.

And then another one during Fall Term that I’ll talk about was this pumpkins in the Native American culture and that was held on Halloween. So, I partnered with the Women’s Center and they do an international student, like, dance almost on Halloween and it’s held in the MU Ballroom, and I was like, well, I want to do something for Halloween because I like Halloween and I thought well pumpkins, they’re a major staple in Native American food so why not, bring that idea into a carving pumpkins on Halloween? And especially international students don’t really know how to carve a pumpkin so we actually had a couple hundred pumpkins and taught about 1000 people, we kind of shared, how to carve a pumpkin, so that was like probably one of my favorite events because there were so many people that didn’t really know what we were doing, so we got to teach them that. And we also got to teach them why pumpkins were important, and still are, to the Native American culture. So that was my favorite Fall Term event. Should I just keep going?

NF: Sure, let’s move on to Winter and Spring.

NA: Okay. Winter was kind of a quiet month because we moved into the new center. So, that was a big project in itself though, so that was the highlight of Winter Term but Winter Term was also the first time where I worked with some of the dorms on campus and I liked that aspect of it too because sometimes when you’re holding events, you don’t really get a lot of numbers of people coming to your events so going to them, they kind of provide an audience for you and the people that come are more receptive to hearing what you have to say in the first place ‘cause they’re coming to your event. So, Winter I went to Halsell Hall – um, what was the other one? – Wilson Hall and then I’m working on going to Sackett and it just kind of keeps building on top of itself. But we do dream catcher events, and I think people like, a lot of people have dream catchers and they don’t really know what they are. Or they’ll put them on their car dash and have
them hanging there, which is fine, but I like being able to teach them what it means and teaching them how to make it in an authentic way. Oh, and then our other activities coordinator is doing one with Weatherford, so a lot of the dorms like working with us and that was mainly what I did with Winter Term. Oh, and I also did – I’ll just keep going – so I also did a Finals Week Survival Workshop and I partnered with CAPS, so I think Winter Term I really explored partnerships because it makes planning events a lot easier. But, I brought in a CAPS employee and a graduate student, or he’s a PhD student, and they just kind of, we had an open discussion about, like, “What makes you stressed during finals week? How do you cope with that?” And the reason I did that event was because a lot of people think that our events, I mean they are supposed to be focused around Native American culture, but I feel like, especially with this new center, people were coming in and were saying, “Can I, like, can I be in here?” Is this only for Native Americans?” and that was the main question I was hearing and I was like, okay, I want to do something that opens it up to everyone where everyone can feel welcome and it’s very obviously, I mean finals week survival, you don’t have to be Native American to come to that. That was the last thing I did in Winter Term ‘cause I was getting sick of people saying, “Can I be in here?” but I wanted people to know they could be. Yeah. On to Spring Term?

NF: Sure.

NA: So Spring Term, this term, um, what have I done, let’s see. So, this term has been dominated by planning the Pow Wow which is actually NASA’s thing. So I’m the secretary of NASA as well, Native American Student Association, and even though that’s not really the same thing as the Longhouse, I think they’re closely affiliated, and we’ve, Tyler and I, we’re both in NASA and that’s kind of taken up the most of my time. So, is it okay if we talk about that?

NF: Um-hmm.

NA: Yeah? Okay so, that one was especially meaningful to me because I put the most time in it and I’ve been working on it since like last Spring, since last Pow Wow, so that actually just happened this past weekend so it’s kind of, it’s a relief to have it over with but it’s also like really, I feel successful looking back at it because we drew, I was talking to my mom about this, we were able to draw such a huge community together, well it’s a small community but when we’re all together like that it feels big. And, I really enjoyed that.

[00:10:10]
And then I was talking to what’s-his-name, that guy I just met about the 5k we did. That was really meaningful as well because I’m a health major, public health major, and trying to raise awareness about, well diabetes, ‘cause Jim Thorpe’s 5k Dash for Diabetes was really meaningful, because a lot of Native American’s live in disease and they don’t really know how to take control of that, even though it’s just a 5k, it’s like an event that only last for a couple hours, that little bit of information can make a big difference and even just raising awareness ‘cause we necessarily don’t get a lot of, Native people coming to it, but we get a lot of community members and they can learn in case they didn’t know that this is an issue in the Native culture. We also partnered with a lot of clubs for that event, ‘cause it’s kind of become my baby; my sister and I work on it together because it kind of died out and I just learned that 2003 was the last year it happened. And so, my sister and I, when we came here in 2012, we started it again and then this year, it like quadrupled in size, we got over 50 participants this year, so, those are just the activities that I can think of right now [laughs], yeah.

NF: Okay, great. So what have been some of your challenges, if any, working at the Longhouse and how have you overcome them?

NA: Hmm, um, okay, so I wrote down here, my challenges have been, coming to the Native American Longhouse you have a bunch of different cultures within one culture, so each tribe has their own like specifications in the way they do things and I still don’t know my own culture of the Karuk Tribe like 100 percent through so it’s kind of challenging coming here and not being expected, but people ask you like about this tribe specifically and you’re like, “Well, all tribes are different” and I’m still trying to learn all of the details of them, as many as I can at least. So that’s been a learning process, I’d say has been one challenge. Also being a student, I mean you have, taking classes, I’m taking like 17-18 credits and working and being a student is always a challenge, but I’ve overcame that challenge specifically because, because the Longhouse is so flexible. They really work well because they know you’re a student, that’s why you’re here in the first place.

NF: Well, then it sounds like you’ve talked about this a little bit already with all you’re amazing activities…

NA: Aww, thanks.

NF: but, what have been some of your, what you consider your successes working at the Longhouse?
NA: Yeah, so, I kind of did already touch on these, but I would say, hmm, involving as many community members as I can with branching out to the dorms and to the different centers. Oh and we worked for the 4Cs, to do a Transforming Columbus Day event. I really liked that one in particular because it takes this, figure in the American culture of Christopher Columbus, he’s like this great gut that founded America, but really, I mean people were here before him so I like any event where I can, transmit a message that people might not have thought of before. So those, anytime I can do that I’m happy and I feel like most of the time working here that’s what happens, so that’s a major success to me.

NF: And you mentioned this a little bit with the example you gave with working with the 4Cs but can you talk a little bit more about your interactions with the other cultural centers?

NA: Yeah so, the other cultural centers, it’s all been positive to me at least. They’re really; it’s like a support system within a support system. They, everyone’s’ honestly just really nice, like, we did a staff training at the beginning before we all started school and that was really nice getting to know everyone, so now when I call over to another center, I know who I’m talking to and we actually, we all get along pretty well, at least I do with the staff from the other centers. Yeah, and I think we support each other’s’ events too, which is nice, to have that other aspect of support, level of support, it’s all about support, so yeah [laughs].

[00:14:58]

NF: Okay, well this next set of questions is about the new Longhouse, so were you part of the design process of the new Longhouse or when you came had that already been pretty much done?

NA: Yeah, when I got here that, that was done already. They had the blueprints up on the wall; it was pretty much all done.

NF: So in terms of transitioning from the old Longhouse to the new one, since you were here during the transition, what does the new Longhouse mean to you?

NA: Hmm, ah well, it means a lot of things, I think it shows the university’s commitment to the Native community because Oregon has, I think Portland’s like the ninth most concentrated, urban Native population and we have such an under representation of that here at OSU, and I mean, I just think there’s a major disconnect there, and them building this new center, I mean it’s beautiful, and I think it really does show their commitment, I mean hopefully. But it means a lot of things like we added
the name “Eena Haws” at the end of Native American Longhouse, so I think it shows, we stayed committed to the people that worked at the Longhouse before by keeping Native American Longhouse, but we also added “Eena Haws” because when you’re here, everyone’s a Beaver, “Eena” means “Beaver” and I was a part of that conversation and voting on the new name. And I just think the Longhouse, I mean the old one was like this too but it just formed such a sense of community, which I think is really important and you need to keep that with you, so I could go on and on, but it means a lot of things [laughs].

NF: Great, so this next set of questions is about ideas for the future and sort of the bigger picture of the Longhouse. So what projects, events, activities, would you have liked to have seen or would you recommend for the future.

NA: So one major event that I was kind of disappointed to not see done was “Calling All Natives” and it’s an event that I guess, this is my first, was my first year so I wasn’t too familiar with it in the Fall right when school’s starting where you get a phone list of all the people that self-identify as Native American and Alaska Native and you personally call them and say, “We’re just welcoming you to the campus, we have a gift basket” – I guess, they’ve done that in the past – and I thought that was a really good idea because we are so underrepresented we might as well reach out and it’s doable to call everyone personally, so I really hope that that can get done next year ‘cause it didn’t happen this year, and that’s important.

NF: And what advice would you give future Longhouse staff or OSU cultural staff in general?

NA: I guess the biggest piece of advice I would give is to ask questions because if you don’t know what’s going on, I mean, just, just ask. And like, if you don’t know an aspect of the culture or referring to something, this happened to me, where someone’s referring to something, where I’m just like, “Okay, what is that?” so don’t be shy to ask questions about the culture because that’s what you’re here to do, you’re here to learn about the culture so that you are able to teach other people about it, definitely ask questions would be my biggest piece of advice, yeah, for someone else.

NF: So based on working here at the Longhouse what is the takeaway or a couple of the takeaways that you’ve gained that you’d like to share with others?

NA: I think working at the Longhouse, the biggest takeaway that I’ve gained is that culture, it is important, and I wish I could think of a better word than “important” because it’s more than important, but I think the Longhouse has taught me how to come to a new place, ‘cause it’s away from home, and make this bond with new people that
I’ve never met before, but you become, you become close to them and Daniel always
calls us a family which, it’s kind of nice because it almost is that way, and so I think the
biggest thing I’ve taken away from this experience is how to come to a totally new
community and how to make myself a part of it or have them welcome me into it; um,
does that answer the question? Yeah, okay.

NF: Okay, so for you what is the biggest issue or the most important reason in terms of
the purpose of the Native American Longhouse in terms of why it’s important?

NA: So I think the Native American Longhouse is important because, it provides a
space not only for Native students but for people that just need a place to go, like, if I’m
on campus and I think, “Oh, shoot, I need to go print that assignment” like, I always
know this is here; or if it’s, just starts to rain really hard, I know I can come to the
Longhouse and it’s just all around important too because the people going to this
college to university should know what was here before them, like, Native Americans
were here long before they were and like, that gets lost, I mean the university’s showing
its commitment now but we were in that little Quonset Hut forever and not many
people even know what this is, so I think it’s important because people need to
remember what was here before them.

NF: So how would you describe the impact of the Longhouse on Native students?

NA: Well, for me personally as a Native student on OSU’s campus, it’s impacted me
because it’s made me want to learn more about it which might seem kind of weird, but
so I’m in this psychology class and we’re learning about ethnic minorities in
mainstream white societies and how when you’re in that type of community you’re
more likely to not want to embrace your ethnic background which is - there’s this whole
like psycho-social aspect about it - but I feel like that happened to my Papa, my mom’s
dad, and he didn’t, it’s not that he didn’t embrace it, it’s just he got a lot of racism, or
discriminated against, and I could see it hurt him, and now that he’s passed my mom
has really found her native roots again and really started to connect with it and she
started to have me connect with it and, let’s see what question are we on?

NF: How the Native American Longhouse has impact Native Students.

NA: Oh, okay yeah, so coming here after my mom had started to reconnect, ‘cause it’s
never lost ‘cause it’s always a part of who we were but there’s been that, discrimination
that’s made him kind of shy away from it and so I don’t feel like my mom could have
learned as much as she could have, but she is a very spiritual person and you can see
that when you meet her - I mean if you ever do but - and so it’s impacted, the Longhouse has impacted me because coming here is makes me want to learn more and as much things as I can, like I’ll come in and there’s something going on, I’m like, I wanna learn about that and I wanna know more about that, and so I think that biggest impact on me and other Native students is learning about not only your own culture, but all aspects of the culture itself, ’cause it’s a big umbrella. That’s the biggest impact.

NF: And how would you describe the impact of the Longhouse on the OSU and local community?

NA: I feel like the Longhouse has attracted a lot of community members and so I think it’s been a positive impact. Like people will just be coming through here and they’ll be saying, “I’ve been watching this get built online and I so happy it’s finally here!” And I mean, Corvallis, my dad always jokes around and says, “College students and retired people” [laughs], and there, I mean, there is an older population that does come through here, and they’re really excited to see this cultural center here for them, but I have heard some negative comments which I don’t really like to talk about, but when this first was, literally my first day here open, so people were walking by and were like, “Well, what is this?” and I could hear them talking and one of the girls was like, “It’s a waste of a parking lot” and I could not believe what I was hearing, could not believe it, and I didn’t know what to say about them, but I feel like it’s been a positive impact other than that. I mean there’s always going to be negativity but for the most part the Longhouse has positively impacted OSU and the local community. I’d like to think [laughs]

[00:25:00]

NF: And what would be your suggestions or your ideas for future collaboration between OSU and the local community perhaps to help bridge that gap and educate people?

NA: Let’s see, for future collaboration between OSU and the local community, I think, so the Longhouse kind of feels like it’s a different culture when you come in here and I think people are intimidated by that and maybe one collaboration could be like with the MU, I’ve kind of reached out to the Memorial Union president, I don’t remember her name right now, but she’s really, she’s really nice and they get a lot of exposure, so working with groups on campus that get a lot of exposure is what I would suggest because we want this to be a bigger thing, like we want it to grow and in order to do that you have to work with people that get a lot of exposure, and I wish it wasn’t like that but you need to know how to, how to make something grow and I think that’s the
best way to do that. The other future collaborations would be, anything that kind of
makes people want to come I guess; like things that are interesting and things that
might not have been done before. That’s a good one, because sometimes you get in a rut
doing the same thing over and over, but bringing new ideas in, is awesome and I think
working and collaborating with OSU or the community can bring in new ideas too.

NF: Okay. And can you describe your thoughts on why sharing your stories is
important to your identity, if it is?
NA: Yeah, so, actually when I first heard about this idea, I was like, I don’t like to – I
mean I like to talk obviously but [laughs] I get kind of shy sometimes, but I think it’s
important because the Native American saying “Every decision we make, let us think
about the seventh generation ahead of us” and so by having this recorded and having
this shared with sharing my own stories, maybe someone, who knows, in like a
hundred years from now, needs to know what was happening here a hundred years
ago and they can look back at this and they’ll be able to see other people’s stories. And
let’s see, it’s important to my own identity because kind of that saying I said, as a
Native American we like to think about our future generations and that’s kind of my
identity as a whole, and it works into the future generations as well, but who doesn’t
want to be remembered, you know? That too, so yeah.

NF: Okay, so if you’d like can you describe your experiences at OSU pertaining to your
identity, your Native identity?

NA: Yeah, so there’s been positive and negative, kind of mentioned the negative one
earlier. But when I’m like in class even, as a Public Health major we’ll talk about, let’s
see, health disparities in minorities, and we’ll use Native Americans and they always
talk about diabetes and I think, and alcoholism, also they talk about that a lot. And I’ll
always make a point that you know fry bread and all this fatty food that is put on the
reservations is not, it’s not native to the Natives. So it was out there and that’s what
they were given and they had to eat it if they wanted to survive so I’ll make that point
in my classes, so that’s been an experience that I’ve had while here at OSU is, the
people, they don’t like to blame Native Americans for being obese or why does this
population have such an increased rate of diabetes but I’ll just, I mean, they’re not, they
don’t really know, I feel that they don’t know the whole story so I let them know
[laughs]. And I always make a point to do that because it’s not, it’s not the right story
that they’re getting. But there are lots of positive things too, of course, there’s always
positive, especially with Joe Burton being here for the basketball team, I think a lot of
people feel, like the N7 shirts, people think that’s cool or they think that’s, like, I want
that shirt but they want to know the meaning behind it too, or I want them to know the
meaning behind it too. So I think just seeing those N7 shirts when people walk by, it’s
like, it’s a positive thing, ‘cause it’s like, your raising awareness even if you don’t know
that you are, but they’ve been positive more than negative but I feel like the negative ones kind of stick out a little bit. But the new Longhouse though has been amazing, so I’m just so happy it’s here, so there’s a lot of experiences I could talk about.

[00:30:30]

NF: And so would perhaps say that you see yourself as an advocate? Is that something that you enjoy doing or do you feel that you have to? Or is it a mix of both?

NA: Yeah, I think, and I don’t want to make myself sound like a rebel student that just [laughs] or anything like that but I do feel like an advocate because we are so underrepresented on campus and maybe even if you do come here, I wasn’t, I didn’t live on a reservation, but if you do come here from a reservation or if you do, Native culture is, your kind of soft spoken, you don’t, I mean you don’t like to interrupt or any of that but you know if it needs to be done, I’ll do it because it’s, it needs to be heard, and I feel like, I mean there’s, there’s this one other Native person in my class and I know, I asked him like afterwards, one class, “Are you Native?” and it’s just kind of like that connection, it’s there before you even know the person but I guess I’d like to think of myself as an advocate, yeah [laughs].

NF: Okay well, is there any other additional information that you’d like to share that we haven’t discussed or is there anything that you’d like to go back to that we’ve talked about and share more?

NA: Hmm, not that I can think of.

NF: Okay, well, so just as a little extra follow up, I’m interested if you could share just a little bit about the Native American Student Association and how you see its mission and the Longhouse mission and how you see those intersecting or how you see them as different?

NA: Yeah, um, yeah, can I clear one thing up, so regarding the me speaking out in class, yeah because so, we’re learning like, what they teach you is you know Native Americans have x, y, z rates of diabetes and then we move on but they don’t say like what’s behind that so I like to make sure people know. Yeah, so that’s why I do that, it’s they don’t tell you why they just tell you the facts and health is all about prevention so why not? I mean they do, they show some films but yeah so I feel like sometimes they try to skip over it. Yeah, so bridging the gaps between NASA and Longhouse, can you repeat the question?
NF: Can you sort of describe as what you see are the similarities and differences between the two in terms of their missions and their purposes?

NA: Yeah, so our missions and purposes, I feel like they’re pretty much in line with each other but there is a divide between, from what I understand, what I’ve heard is NASA and the Longhouse used to work really closely, but that kind of went away, I don’t really know when. But now they are just two totally different, and I feel like, so I came here and I was first involved with NASA and then I was always in the Longhouse and I was like “Why, why is it like this? Why aren’t we the same thing? ‘Cause we’re already such a small group, why divide it even further?” and so I’ve been trying, like becoming an employee here, I was like, okay, I’m going to work here to make the Pow Wow even better and I’m gonna do this and that, I had wild dreams, but I think that even they’re coming up with some new job descriptions and a new position I believe, possibly, so I think one of those new ones should really be focused on rebuilding that relationship with NASA because it’s kind of gone and it’s hard coming here and there’s a wealth of knowledge in the Longhouse the NASA could really benefit from that we do use but I feel like the effort, it shouldn’t, it shouldn’t be that hard to just kind of, they should work together and that’s that.

NF: And just as a follow up, do you notice that in your experience, so people choose one or the other and in your case you decided to try and bridge the gap? Or is it common for people to participate in both?

NA: Yeah so everyone who works at the Longhouse is technically a member of NASA but they don’t necessarily come to all the meetings or help with the events, or you know like on Facebook they’ll be a member but they don’t help out as much as I would like to be honest and so yeah, I was working here or I was with NASA and I was like well, why is it like this? What can I do? Well I can work at the Longhouse and also be the secretary of NASA I think that will really help bridge the gap and I wrote we had like reviews of our job descriptions and I wrote in it someone should be in charge of working with NASA and I wrote that in my job description but I don’t think anything really came from it so.

NF: So maybe you recommend, like you made a recommendation for next year…

NA: Yes! That would be a major recommendation, is don’t let NASA go away, like don’t, ‘cause they, we are really small club. I think the Longhouse only has like nine or ten employees but NASA only has like five or six and pretty much all of us are graduating so I’m kind of worried about it to be honest so next year people should
really try to reach out and help as much as they can because we really are here for the same reason, might as well work together.

NF: Okay, well great, well other than that, unless there’s something you’d like to add?

NA: Just thank you for doing this.

NF: Well, thank you so much I really appreciate it.

NA: Yeah, thank you.

NF: So just as a little follow up to the distinction between NASA and the NAL can you describe a little about the positives as why you see that it’s important to keep these two entities separate and yet work together?

NA: Yeah so, I think it’s important for NASA to stay its own club and the Longhouse to stay its own entity separate from NASA because if you combine the two then you lose the club aspect of NASA and it’s kind of nice just being able to pop in for a meeting really quick if you have to go and like if you work for the Longhouse you’re technically an employee so I don’t really know if they could just be a club member of a place where people are working so that would kind of get lost and be really sticky and I think ‘cause, the Longhouse it does house NASA and it does provide a space to store some of our stuff, and the staff members do, I mean they do help out but I think the gap should be bridged so when you are hired, it shouldn’t be like an expectation to work with NASA but something should be done where NASA’s not so lost. Because last year was my first year on campus and they’re like, “Do you want to be president of this club?” and it’s like, “Well I don’t even know what I’m doing here” so it’s a positive keeping them separate for sure because you want to keep that club feeling and it’s not so strict it’s not so formal but it’s nice to also have the Longhouse being separate, but they should also work together. It’s like a weird, long story.

NF: Okay, great, thanks for the follow up.

NA: Yes.

[end 00:38:38]