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 22, 2013, and I am interviewing Carmen López, a staff member of the Native American Longhouse at Oregon State University. So we’ll just get started today with some basic interview information, so if you could state your name and spell it out loud.

CL: Okay, my name is Carmen López: C-A-R-M-E-N and then López is L-O- with an accent on the “o” P-E-Z

NF: And what is your home town or what do you consider home for you?

CL: For me I feel like I have two homes. One is in The Dalles where I was raised, I was born in Portland, but my family all lives in The Dalles and then also Corvallis because I have a lot of friends and a really strong community here.

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

CL: I’m 21, I’m a junior double majoring in Spanish and then also Human Development and Family Sciences.

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

CL: No.

NF: Okay. You mentioned that your second home for you is Corvallis. Have you lived in Corvallis prior to coming here for school?
CL: No, I haven’t. I guess it wouldn’t be Corvallis, it would probably be OSU because I don’t really go out in Corvallis just because I find there is a lot of activities here at Oregon State and so I guess that’s why I consider Corvallis a home - because it’s part of OSU. But yeah, I just really find a lot of events I can go to, a lot of friends here.

NF: Okay, great. Well the next set of questions we’ll be talking about and reflect your work with the Longhouse, so we’ll just start with what is your position at the Longhouse and what do you do?

CL: Okay, I’m an Office Assistant. I really just help with running the center, so if a group comes in and needs help with set up or cleaning, I do that. And also answer phones or just any questions that people have when they come into the center if they haven’t been here before. And then just help other co-workers if they need help with events.

NF: Okay, and how many years have you worked here?

CL: I’ve actually only got hired this term so I’ve only been working here fairly recently, like eight weeks.

NF: Oh, like eight weeks? Okay great, and have you worked for any of the other cultural centers?

CL: No, I haven’t.

NF: You haven’t. So why did you did you decide to work for the Longhouse?

CL: I know I’m a junior right now but when I was a freshman a lot of people encouraged me to apply to the cultural centers and I actually knew a lot more people working at the Native American Longhouse. My mentor worked here and she encouraged me to apply, and also Joe Briden who has been working here I think like three or four years, I know he’s very involved in the Native community, and so he encouraged me to apply and then also other friends encouraged me to apply to the Native American Longhouse. So that’s why it kind of popped into my head, “Well yeah, it is a welcoming community, so yeah, I should think about it.” It just kind of got prolonged but eventually I did apply.

NF: Okay, so what were your expectations or your hopes for working here? And were they matched? Surpassed? Not matched? Can you talk a little about that?
CL: I think they were surpassed just because it’s like when I came into the center I had absolutely no idea about the culture. But it was very welcoming because when I went to the Native American Quonset Hut, everyone just really welcomed me. And so, the staff also - when I came to work here as a staff member - they also really welcomed me. I know that some staff members like, I didn’t know how to make a dream catcher, a staff member showed me how to do that… like totem art and I collaborated with another Native American Longhouse staff to do [a booth for the Earth Day event]. So it’s been really, it’s been surpassed and very welcoming and I’ve learned how to do other crafts. I feel like I still need to know a little bit more about the culture but other than that everyone has been really friendly.

NF: Great. So even though you’ve only worked here for about a term, can you describe some of the projects, events, activities that you’ve assisted with and that you’ve worked on?

CL: I worked in the Earth Day [event] which was April 23rd. I worked with another staff member and she couldn’t do it because she had class so I ended up looking up the information about Native American crafts, how they pertain to the environment, and the kind of materials they used to kind of reflect kind of like Earth. And so, that was really meaningful to me because I didn’t know anything about the culture until I got to look up on my own like what they meant, different crafts, and what they symbolized. And just share that with the public and I really liked that.

[00:05:26]

NF: Great. And did you focus on Oregon tribes, Oregon communities in particular or did you have a broader focus?

CL: It was more general because I know I looked up moccasins or like animal hides and just like beading so it was just very general.

NF: Okay. So other than Earth Day are there any other events or activities this term that have been particularly fun that you’d like to share or that you enjoyed participating in?

CL: I really liked the Salmon Bake. I was really, really busy. I know I was busy Tuesday the day before doing kitchen prep, but I really liked that just because I really got to help out. I wanted that experience to work in the kitchen prep to prepare the food that we were going to serve and also during the day of I was also there in the morning wrapping up salmon in tin foil. I really liked that because I got to see the salmon before it was cooked, before it was like cut, before it was served and so that was really, really particularly meaningful. Like, I don’t know, for me I just really took a lot importance
that I saw like every stage of how the food was prepared and actually got to serve it to people. I wish there was more communication of like, the work that we did and just how much dedication we put in to provide that food to the community is like, very, very important.

**NF:** Do you wish that that stage was more open to the public? Because for the most part you do that prior to the event and then the community only sees the final product?

**CL:** Yeah, I really wish that even during the final product we would have like a separate booth educational-wise. It’s like, “Well this is why we do it.” I know that Karly Law who is actually part of the Native American Student Association, she talked about it because someone asked but I really feel that we should have like a more general... like a booth, like an NAL Booth, where people can ask questions or we explain the meaning of it because salmon is like very important to the tribes in the Pacific Northwest and they really do this event to like...because salmon is very important and during this time there is a lot of salmon and they really want to give to the community. And I just felt that we did have a good turnout but I felt like some people just went there for free food and had no idea why we serve salmon or why we...because we also served camas and a lot of people don’t know what that is and that’s like a native plant that they serve. It’s kind of very traditional plant before the colonists came and people don’t even know about that, so maybe just a little explanation about that. I know some groups also had questions but that was for extra credit, like I really wish we would have had questions that people could ask us because people in general they don’t know what to ask either.

**NF:** Okay, well maybe for next year? Okay is there anything else that you would like to share before we move on?

**CL:** No, that’s it.

**NF:** Okay, so can you describe any challenges that you’ve had working here and how overcame them?

**CL:** For me I felt like since I was really apprehensive just because I wasn’t Native American, coming into the center, like at first when I just wasn’t an employee it was okay, but when I came as a staff member I was really comprehensive because I didn’t know if I could provide that support to natives, native students or how would that look like. But I just really overcame that just by like, remembering past experiences of when other staff members had welcomed me into the center and I’ve tried to do that like if people try to come in and they look around and if they haven’t been there before I ask them “Do you have any questions? Have you been here before?” just really talk to people and just make that welcoming environment and feel free to ask questions. And
if I don’t know the question, like, if I don’t know like what hide, because we have some mounted animal hides, I mean it’s Elk hide but if I don’t know information then I know who to direct it to.

**NF:** So how about if you talk about your successes working at the NAL?

**CL:** I don’t know. I feel really proud because I made a dream catcher, I was actually supposed to show people how to make a dream catcher during the Salmon Bake but we didn’t have enough supplies, but I really enjoyed doing that and just learning about the crafts and what they mean was really, really important to me.

**NF:** Great. So have you had any interactions with staff from the other cultural centers in terms of events or just interactions in general?

**CL:** So since it’s the end of the term, I know every cultural center is busy doing their own thing and so I haven’t but I actually do know other people from the different cultural centers, like the Black Cultural Center, I know some of my friends there and then other people who work at the Centro Cultural César Chávez, the 4Cs, I know a lot of people there because they’re CAMP members, from College Assistance Migrant Program. So, I have some friends everywhere, scattered.

**NF:** Great. Okay so recently the Longhouse now has a new Longhouse and it was recently dedicated, there was an opening ceremony, so were you a part of that design process or did you at least know about it even though weren’t officially involved with the center?

**CL:** So I was involved in building and I was gone during Fall Term so I wasn’t sure when the planning stage was, I think it was during last year but there is no way for me to get contact. But no, I didn’t really know about the planning stage, so I wasn’t really involved in that.

**NF:** But being a junior you, means that a couple of years ago you had seen the old Longhouse, the Quonset Hut and you had interacted with the staff there, correct?

**CL:** Yeah but I didn’t know…well, I heard they were getting a new center but I didn’t know that it was going to be student input, I just heard about it and I thought it was just more like staff and stuff but I was just really happy for them that they were going to get a new center but I didn’t really provide any input.
NF: Okay. Well what does the new Longhouse mean to you considering that you had interacted with the staff members and attended events at the old one and now you’re working at the new one? Can you talk a little bit about your feelings about that?

CL: I know I was like talking to someone earlier about that because I really miss the former Quonset Hut at the NAL because we had a lot of [MECha] meetings there and just a lot of friends were there, like I would come in during my free time and I would like talk to [my CAMP mentor [who also worked there], tell her how I was doing and so I really do miss that little hut and I know a lot of people are like, “Oh yeah this center is so much bigger, the new NAL is so much bigger, there is so much space” but I really do miss the old former Longhouse. So it’s been kind of hard but I’m still kind of getting used to it. But it’s beautiful, I’m glad that they got a new center.

NF: Great. Okay well, moving on another set of questions talking about ideas for the future, sort of the bigger picture. So you talked about this a little bit with the Salmon Bake and what you’d like to see happen there in the future, but other than that what projects, events, activities would you have liked to have seen or would you recommend for the future?

CL: I would really just recommend just doing that whole education piece during the Salmon Bake. And then, so I haven’t been here…I was gone during Fall because I was studying abroad so I wasn’t able to see when they…because they have their Heritage Month in November so I wasn’t there so I don’t really know how they do explain like dream catchers. Like if there was that educational component but I would really like to add that because I think it’s very important that people kind of get that message away because when you make a dream catcher you’re not supposed to like…you’re supposed to hang it up, it’s not just supposed to be like laying around. Just because it’s like all of the materials that are being used like leather, sinew, like, are very important, they are all made from like…well, traditionally they are all made from animals [material] like right now it’s more artificial sinew or artificial leather but they do have meaning. So like really let people know that. I think it’s very, very important.

NF: Okay. So what advice would you give future NAL staff or other cultural center staff?

CL: I really think that you shouldn’t be discouraged if you don’t identify with a particular cultural center that you’re applying for. I really think it’s a really good experience to experience another culture because just when I came to the Native American Longhouse I felt like I went abroad again, it was a culture shock because I had absolutely no idea what to do. I was kind of a little bit lost but staff members were like, “Oh, do you know how to do this craft” and they just would show me and stuff.
So I just really think that you should put yourself out there and apply to other cultural centers that you don’t identify with and just ask questions too because people aren’t going to know you’re lost unless you say something. And so, just really just ask questions and just partner up with coworkers because I know office assistants sometimes there isn’t a lot to do, so just partner up with coworkers. That’s how I got started and then maybe expand it. I hope to next, if I get rehired, expand it to working with other cultural centers.

[00:15:15]

NF: Great. So based on working here at the Longhouse, what is one of the major - you can say more - but what is one of the main takeaways that you gained that you would like to share with others?

CL: For me it’s just more of a culture. I’m just really appreciated of it and I feel like I really have a lot to learn. I know that there was a performance that a professor from the Ethnic Studies department did, his name is Qwo-Li [Driskill] and he did a performance about two spirit Native Americans and I just really liked that, I really liked his performance. And so I really just take away is just really try to educate yourself about different communities.

NF: Okay. Can you explain two spirit a little bit?

CL: Two sprit is when… I’m probably not going to say it right, but it’s basically when you identify that it’s mixed - where you don’t identify as a man or a woman. It’s combined, you’re two spirit. I don’t really know how to explain it; it’s really just one gender. It’s almost like a third gender besides man and woman.

NF: And this was an event that you attended prior to your working at the Longhouse?

CL: No, it was while I was working here. I didn’t see it in any other flyers. I just happened to be here. It was outside of my work hours and I was just here studying. And then, all the sudden I noticed something was going on in the back. I’m like, “Oh! I didn’t even know this event was going on.” So there are advantages of already being here, because some events, you know for some reason, aren’t advertised or just get lost.

NF: So what is the biggest issue for you in terms of the purpose of the Longhouse, and why it’s important?

CL: I think it’s important. Because I do know that I miss the former Longhouse. But just a lot of people come in and they just really like the center. I think it’s really, really important that we got a bigger center, just because I notice there are a lot more activities
that go on, a lot of people do come in. All the time there’s a lot of new people coming in - it’s like, “I’ve never been here before!” And so, I really like that, so I think it’s really important just for a space for Native Americans to come here to feel safe, and to have a place to study, or have a place to hang out. Also, other students can come too to learn about the culture.

**NF:** How would you describe the impact of the longhouse on Native students?

**CL:** I think it’s really, really important. Because, like I said again, it provides that space. But also, the Longhouse tries to do a lot of activities that focus on Native American students. Like that event by Qwo-Li, Two Spirit. Also, we had story telling by our elder, Delphine does a lot of storytelling. She did one this term, I just couldn’t go. But I think it’s very important because we do do events for specific Native American students and then other people outside of the community to learn too.

**NF:** What would describe or how would you describe the impact of the longhouse on the OSU and local community?

**CL:** Yeah, so, I wasn’t part of the planning stage, but they actually attached a new name. It’s “The Native American Longhouse – Eena Haws” and “Eena Haws” is Chinook jargon, it’s kind of like a specific Northwest trader language. “Eena” means “beaver” and then “Haws” means “house.” So it was kind of emphasizing that you don’t have to be Native American to come to the longhouse, because we’re all Beavers. All OSU students, alumni are welcome into the community.

**NF:** Great. Do you have any suggestions or ideas for future collaboration with OSU and the local community?

**CL:** Not really, just because I feel like I’m still learning about the culture, so to put out an idea, I’m not sure about it yet. But I would like to see collaboration with the 4Cs and the NAL just because as a Mexican, as a Latina culture there are a lot of indigenous roots that sometimes get pushed away. But I would like to see some collaboration with that because I know that there’s Aztec and Mayan. And specifically since the Mayan calendar– I don’t know if there was an event about that. But definitely a lot more collaboration with those two centers would be nice.

[00:20:10]

**NF:** Can you describe your thoughts on why sharing your stories is an important part of your identity? If it is, if it’s not, that’s okay. But if it is...
CL: I think it’s important. Working at the Longhouse emphasizes a lot of stuff that I don’t know about my [Mexican] culture. So it, I’m kind of in this crossroads about learning about the Native American Longhouse and the new information I can learn, but also in a reflection like, “Oh, well I don’t even know that about my [Mexican] culture.” So, I think that’s been beneficial for me to know who I am also and strengthen that identity while also exploring a different culture as well.

NF: So looking at the bigger picture of race relations on campus, can you describe your experiences at OSU pertaining to your self-identified racial or ethnic identity here on campus?

CL: Yeah so, while I was in high school, I didn’t really identify as anything. I know there were some general demographic surveys that you had to fill out and mark your race and your gender and stuff like that. That’s the only time I really picked a race – when I was required to. That really changed, so I identify as Latina, Mexican, and also Chicana. That kind of identity emerged when I came here to OSU in the classes that I took. I think OSU has been really helpful with that. Before I really didn’t identify as anything, and I just feel like a more whole person because I can pick an identity and I know what that means.

NF: Wonderful, so is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to add? Or anything we have discussed that you’d like to provide additional information about?

CL: I think that’s fine.

NF: Okay, well thank you very much.

[end 00:22:30]