NF: My name is Natalia Fernández. I am the Oregon Multicultural Librarian, a staff member with OSU Special Collections & Archives Research Center. Today’s date is May 19, 2014, and I am interviewing Hali’a Parish, a staff member of the Asian & Pacific Cultural Center at Oregon State University. So let’s get started. If you could state your name and spell it out loud.

HP: Sure, my name is Hali’a Parish.

NF: And what is your hometown or where is home for you?

HP: Home for me is in ‘Ewa Beach, Hawai’i located on the island of O’ahu.

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

HP: I am 21 years old, and I am a senior graduating this June, and I am majoring in Speech Communication and Innovation Management.

NF: What are you self-identities in terms of race and ethnicity?

HP: I identify myself as a native Hawaiian, however I am also Japanese and German.

NF: In terms of your work at APCC, what’s your position here, and how many years have you worked here?

HP: I have worked here for one year so far as an activities coordinator. However, last year I worked at the Native American Longhouse as an office assistant.

NF: So why did you decide to work at the APCC this year?
HP: This year I decided to branch away from the Native American Longhouse and work as an activities coordinator at the Asian Pacific Cultural Center because I felt like, as a pacific islander, I could better be able to relate to the cultures here, and I could definitely put on events and tie in that connection.

NF: What were your expectations, your hopes for your work here, and were they matched, surpassed, or not matched?

HP: I definitely expected the same thing when I worked at the NAL and when I moved over. A lot of the staff here are very friendly and we work together as a team, and I felt like my expectations were definitely met.

NF: Can you describe your projects, events, activities during fall term, winter term, and spring term that were especially meaningful to you?

HP: Sure, so this year, one of my first events was actually, “What’s Musubi?” Musubi, in Hawai’i, is one of the one things that was actually created because of the abundances of cultures and diversity within Hawai’i. I basically wanted to talk about diversity as a main topic and we created these Spam Musubis and we got to eat them and we all got to talk about what we identified ourselves as and how being more than one culture, or having more than one ethnicity can definitely, is totally fine, and you can identify yourself as anything you want. That’s what we did and we enjoyed the snacks, so it was really fun. I also did a Hula and Tahitian workshop. One of my favorites that we just did was an event “Native Sands, Native Lands” and we kind of just talked about the history of the Native Americans, and this was in collaboration with the NAL. We talked about the history, and we all talked about how language has changed so far. Everybody identified their own languages and how that plays into effect of who they identify themselves as in their culture. Those were some of my events.

NF: So, how many activities do you usually do per term?

HP: We usually put on two events per term. However, we’ve tried something new within the past winter and spring. My co-worker Peter and I are both activity coordinators so we actually tried to work as a team instead of doing individual events. So, we’ve definitely teamed up, helped each other out and we put on at least four events a term. This term we actually did more and I think it’s because of our Asian Pacific Cultural Heritage Month. It was really fun working with him.

NF: So, what have been your challenges working at the APCC, and how have you overcome them?
HP: Some of my challenges…let’s see…I think one big challenge is always managing my schoolwork, because it does take a lot of time out of my school schedule. They definitely work around my school schedule, and that’s no problem, but we also have homework and projects and other things going on. I also worked as the Lua Coordinator for the Hui O Hawai‘i and that is a huge event that’s on the OSU campus, and we actually work on that all year long, so that took a lot of time away. A lot of times I was able to combine my work with my planning for the luau because they supported the luau, which is really great. It’s always a struggle, time management is hard, but it all works out in the end.

NF: How many hours do you typically work per week?

HP: I work…it varies sometimes between 13 to 14 hours a week.

NF: And in addition how many would you say that work for other student groups and other activities that you do?

HP: I would definitely; I want to say about an hour a day for the Luau; that takes a lot of planning. Then school work is just the usual ongoing thing that I’m always working on. Always busy.

NF: So you’ve mentioned the great events that you’ve put on and collaboration with your coworkers, what have been some of your other successes working at the APCC in addition to those?

HP: Some of my successes: I think building friendships, getting to know new people, being able to help out in other events that I otherwise wouldn’t have known if I hadn’t worked here is definitely rewarding to me. Bringing people into the center is always fun because I don’t think a lot of students realize the resources that we have here. If they are able to just come here, use up our resources and just relax and build relationships, that’s always important to me and I think helping other people be retained at OSU is really enjoyable for me.

NF: So you mentioned working with the NAL on one of your activities, what have been some of your interactions with staff from the other cultural centers? Is it mostly working together to put together events?

HP: Yes, definitely. I think the Diversity Development in general does a great job at promoting all the events to all the cultural centers so we are all aware of the timing of the events, and the things that are going on. I’m always aware, I can’t always make time
in my schedule to go to them, but there have been a couple times where I did attend events. I obviously have a close relationship with the Native American Longhouse, sometimes I go back over there and help out a little bit, and I have a lot of other friends there too. That’s really fun. Then my one event in collaboration with them was one thing that really stood out. That’s one way that I think that really connects us is when we really collaborate for those things.

NF: Can you talk a little bit about your process as an activities coordinator. From the beginning do you have an idea, does someone bring an idea to you, and then how do you start planning it and what do you do in the process of making that happen?

HP: It’s actually, that’s a pretty interesting question because a lot of our ideas come from simple conversations that we have. A lot of times I’ll be sitting down at work with a coworker and we’ll be just talking about some of the things that are happening on campus today and some of the struggles that people are going through. Then we’ll be like “Hey, let’s make that an event!” So one example, Peter and I and couple other of our coworkers were actually sitting down and we started talking about dreams we had. We’re like, “You know last night I had this weird dream…” It was just really funny and one of our other coworkers, Ji-Hae, shared how in the Korean culture they interpret dreams in this way. We said, “Hey, that could be great event.” So we actually created an event called “Dream Out Loud” and that’s just kind of our how our events come about. It’s really just thinking about what can we do to grasp people’s attention and make them interested in coming. Where it’s not just, you know a typical lecture that every student goes to, but something that they can gain, and at the same time learn about culture awareness.

NF: Wonderful. So, in terms of the new center, the APCC just had its groundbreaking for the new center. Can you talk a little bit about what that means to you and if you’re a part of the process in that, or if you were a part of the ground breaking and just talk about that in general?

HP: Yeah, I’m honored to be able to work with the staff this year and be a part of the planning process of the ground breaking. We are all really excited. I was actually a part of the event. Myself and a few other girls were actually able to chant for the opening of the event. I think it was really, really fun and we did that same chant for the Luau. I think right after the Luau people got to hear it again, I think they’re really appreciative. Then just being there in that environment and seeing how people are so excited for us to have a new center is really, really rewarding to me. I’m privileged to be a part of it and I can’t wait to come back next year and visit.

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NF: Can you talk a little bit about the differences or similarities since you experienced the NAL getting its new center, and now you’re experiencing this center. Can you talk a little bit about that experience about getting to be a part of both?

HP: Yeah. I, again, I’m honored. I’m sure that five years from now, ten years or way down the road I’ll be able to come back and say that I was here when it started. So it’s really exciting. At the NAL I remember learning a lot of things, I remember just being a part of the environment and seeing the excitement on people’s faces and the joy of the Native American cultures and Pacific Islanders so excited for something to be there just so that people can appreciate the culture that is here at OSU. Moving onto the Asian & Pacific Culture Center, I mean I honestly thought that we’d probably have it built by now so it’s too bad I didn’t get to be in both, but I was a part of the ground breaking process. I think that it’s really fun. I mean, how many people can say that they’re a part of two things that, two buildings that mean so much to the OSU students? I mean, so, I’m honored.

NF: In terms of ideas for the future and the bigger picture, what projects, events, activities would you have liked to have seen, or would you recommend for the future?

HP: I would definitely recommend more collaboration. This year I was only able to do one, and I think that idea came to me later. I think in the future definitely using up the staff and making them go out of their comfort zones, stepping outside of their own culture center and going to other culture centers and, you know, talking amongst their staff and seeing what we can do to combine events because one struggle that we always have is attendance. When there’s food, and free stuff and crafts, a lot more people tend to come. I think using that creativity, and I think the bigger group there is to discuss those things, the better. Which is a reason why Peter and I actually came together to plan a lot of events, because I feel like the more people are involved in your planning and your conversations, the better. I would definitely recommend collaborations between centers more often.

NF: Do you think that moving the APCC closer to the center of campus will be a benefit to that end?

HP: Definitely. Right now we are kind of in the outskirts of campus. Even at the Native American Longhouse, when I used to work there, a lot of people passed by, but they never really saw it because it was this little Quonset hut. As soon they built it up and made it so beautiful, people, when they come visit the campus, they see it. I think it’s important for students to know that the cultural centers are here; and I think when the Asian Pacific Culture Center moves to the center of campus people will definitely walk in more often and just get a quick tour and see all of the resources that are there.
NF: What advice would you give future APCC staff or cultural center staff in general?

HP: I would definitely advise them to get close with your workers, with your coworkers and just all of the staff in general, even during the retreats before. Getting in contact with the other cultural center and building relationships with them first hand before you start the year off because those people are going to be the ones that are going to be supporting you and your events and work and helping you through your struggle and through school. We’re all here for each other. I think we should definitely push more towards working as a team and working together.

NF: Based on working at the APCC what is a take away that you have gained that you would like to share with others, so something that you’ll definitely remember in the years to come?

HP: I definitely feel like diversity is something that I was never actually aware of until I came here. Growing up in Hawai‘i we have many different cultures, but I never realized all the individual cultures and that everyone can identify in a different way. I definitely learned and I grew throughout my experiences here. I learned that my identity and my perceptions of my identity is changing and will always change and that’s ok, so that’s something that I definitely took away.

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NF: What do you think is the biggest issue in terms of the purpose of the APCC? Why would you tell people that the APCC is important?

HP: I would definitely tell them that its important because we get to learn about cultures and I feel like a lot of people don’t always know the importance of going out of your comfort zone and meeting new people in different cultures because you know this world that we live in we are growing to a more diverse development. It’s just a lot different than what it was before so to be involved in that change is definitely important.

NF: How would you describe the impact of the APCC on Asian Pacific Islander students?

HP: I think they are doing a great job. Myself as a Pacific Islander, I was definitely moved by all the events and all the things that I learned here and I brought a lot of my friends and a lot of the other Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans here and I feel like they all definitely learned something when they come by. You can never not gain something when you come by the APCC, there’s something always happening.
NF: How would you describe the impact of the APCC on the OSU and local community?

HP: I think that they definitely do a great job. A lot of our events are open to the community and not just OSU students. I think we should go forward with that, and we could even collaborate with people out in the community and bring them into the cultural centers so that they are aware of the things that are going on here. I think that’s something that we could do more on but I definitely think that they are doing a good job so far.

NF: You just mentioned this, but what suggestions or ideas do you have for future collaboration with the OSU and local community?

HP: Definitely more things. I know sometimes organizations would call in the Asian Pacific Cultural Center just to see if we could have some people speak at their events, so maybe bringing them back in here and having them reach out to students and seeing what their knowledge and experiences could always bring to us, that would be great.

NF: As the activities coordinator, do you tend to reach out to others? Or do you, like you mentioned, get phone calls, you work with other student organizations, but do you work with other departments or residence halls or does that come up?

HP: Yes, for the “Dream Out Loud” event I believe we worked with CAPS. We worked with Marcie who is also one of our advisors and she mentored us along the way as well. So that was just one of the events that we did to reach out to other departments on campus, but we can definitely do more.

NF: Can you describe your thoughts on why sharing your stories is important to your identities? If it is?

HP: Let’s see…yes, I think sharing like what we’re doing right now, the oral history project, I think it’s really important for people to know what happened in the past. I’m glad that it’s documented because they can look back and you know, use the same ideas and take my opinions and my suggestions and use it to improve events and ongoing things in the future.

NF: Great. So this is a big picture question. You mentioned that it’s important for people on campus and local community to be more culturally aware, and get out of their comfort zone a little bit, can you describe your experiences at OSU pertaining to your racial or ethnic identities and how that’s affected your perception on campus or what you’ve observed here on campus pertaining to some of those issues?
HP: Yeah, of course. So I mentioned this a little bit earlier, but growing up in Hawai‘i, I never really considered how different I was until I stepped into a different community here in Corvallis. Then I realized that I am not a part of the majority, I am actually a minority. So that was a huge shocker to me and I felt different than a lot of other students on campus. So that’s one thing I definitely learned. That changed me and I think that when you step outside the box and you see others’ perspectives of you, then you tend to change yourself. That was one thing I definitely learned coming here.

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NF: Is that something that you hope that others will learn, to sort of step outside their boxes to see a little bit about themselves and others?

HP: Yes, definitely. I think by coming to the cultural centers, you definitely look at the other picture and other perspectives, and you learn things that you haven’t. Definitely jumping out of your comfort zone and not just seeing how things are, in your perspective, but seeing others’ perspectives as well.

NF: Great, so is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to add or anything that you want to follow up on?

HP: No, I think everything that we said is pretty much there. I would like to say that I have a great appreciation for Diversity Development and all of the staff that are involved. I think that we’re doing a great job.

NF: Wonderful, thank you so much.

HP: Thank you.

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