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 13, 2014, and I am interviewing Mohamed Shaker, a staff member of the Asian and Pacific Cultural Center at Oregon State University. So let’s get started. Can you please state your name and spell it out loud.

MS: My name is Mohamed Shaker.

NF: What is your hometown, or where is “home” for you?

MS: I was born in Singapore and a lot of my family on my mother’s side still lives in Singapore, so I consider that a kind of home for me. But my parents live in Abu Dhabi in the UAE and I went to college there, and my immediate family still lives there. I would consider that currently home for me.

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

MS: I am currently 19 years old, I’m in my second year at OSU, but I am a junior. My major, I am a double major in history and sociology, currently, with a minor in Asian studies.

NF: And what are your self-identities in terms of race and ethnicity?

MS: In terms of race I would describe myself as a mixed race. My father is Middle Eastern and my mother is Asian. By ethnicity I am also mixed. My father is Arab and my mother Malay. I identify myself as mixed, I associate myself with both identities equally.

NF: So in terms of your work with the Asian Pacific Cultural Center, the APCC, what is your position and what do you do?
MS: My current position with the APCC is I am the community outreach coordinator. What that entails, to explain, we currently have activities coordinators, we have two of them, and those two do events just with the center. My job, on the other hand, is to reach out to the other centers and to other groups on campus, and I’ll plan events with them and I’ll touch base with them. While we have an external coordinator who also does that, my job is to reach out to the other community outreach coordinators and we plan events, and I plan events with them. So my job is really to kind of make those connections that are kind of lower, less institutional level than the external coordinator. It’s a position that I really like because I’ve gotten the ability to kind of interact with all these different people.

NF: And how long have you worked with the APCC?

MS: This is my first year with the APCC, but I will be working here next year as well.

NF: And this position that you have, the community outreach coordinator, is it a new position, or has this position existed in the past?

MS: This position has existed in the past, I don’t know for how long, because we do a lot of reorganization and renaming of the positions. But this position has existed, to my knowledge, for at least the past three years.

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

MS: I have not worked for any of the other cultural centers, but I did work as an administrative assistant in the main office of Diversity Development.

NF: That’s the office that oversees all the cultural centers.

MS: That’s the office that oversees all of us. I was an admin. assistant where I just did basic office work there.

NF: Why did you decide to work at the APCC?

MS: I decided to work at the APCC because, well for a lot of reasons. I kind of wanted the chance to work with this center because a big part of it was my identity as Asian; I really wanted to make connections with other Asian students on campus, and to see what we could build once we made those connections. I see my work at, my decision to work at the APCC wasn’t just something that I felt was natural, like, oh, you know, because I’m Asian I’ll work there. It was a deliberate choice that I made because I wanted to build community here and I wanted to reach out to all the other cultural
centers. I think people, maybe people who don’t come to the centers often, don’t see the work that we do, and don’t see the power that we build here among students on campus. It’s important to remember we do have that power, especially because the cultural centers are institutions on campus, there not just student organizations. I wanted to work within that setting and I wanted to be a part of this center, especially in the time of a lot of changes. So there were a lot of reasons of why I decided to come work here.

[00:05:11]

NF: So you mentioned this a little bit in terms of your expectations and hopes to build community, in addition to that and if you expand a little bit on that, what were your expectations and hopes, and were they matched, surpassed, not matched?

MS: So when I was accepted to work here as the community outreach coordinator, a major goal I had set for myself was that I wanted to hit, not hit, at least have one event with the centers every quarter. Unfortunately that wasn’t able happen just because of scheduling difficulties and stuff, but I’m glad to say that I did, if not plan events with each center, that I did manage to make really close connections with each of the other community outreach coordinators, and that’s something that I really like about my specific position. With the reorganization next year, I don’t know how exactly that’s going to work for students, but for me right now, it was such a great opportunity to, especially with the current location of the APCC on the outskirts of campus, it’s really difficult to have that physical connection. So to be able to go to the other centers and be present there on a regular basis, that was something that I didn’t expect to have a lot of, but it was something that I loved and that I cherished about this position. Other than that, I really wanted to build community centers; I wanted to make really strong connections with the other people. We’re a family here at Diversity Development and I really wanted to be a part of that, I think that was definitely surpassed. Everyone’s been really great and I think we’ve had a great year and I think we’ll have a lot of other great years to come. Internally, however, with the APCC, what I wanted to do was kind of lay a foundation…maybe that’s the wrong way to put it. I wanted to kind of, my interest in my event planning, was I wanted to bring a real kind of social justice element to the APCC. We do a lot of cultural programming, we do a lot of, I don’t want to say fun, that’s not the right word, but we do a lot of social events, sort of culturally minded events, things that are not fun, but things that are more, they engage you on a different level than the kinds of events, on a different set of things, the kind that I want to engage in, which I wasn’t seeing. I wanted to do that and I’m glad to say that I have been able to, and the other staff, our activities coordinators and even our cultural center coordinator who only plan one event a quarter, even they have really put in major effort into creating a social justice program planning into our general program planning and that’s what I thought we really needed and I’m glad to say that’s been surpassed.
NF: Wonderful, well, this is the perfect lead into the next question. Can you describe the projects, events, activities over this past year, the fall term, winter term, and now spring term, that were especially meaningful to you?

MS: Back in fall term I had two events back in fall term. One of them was a movie screening, and the movie that we screened was Tales of the Waria which is a movie about non-western, non-binary gender in Indonesia. For that it was a really big challenge because when you purchase a movie for screening, it becomes much more expensive than if you were just going to buy it for personal use. So, I had to go check out who could support us, and I’m glad to say the Queer Studies program, which is still in its nascent stage here, it only just started in the past year. They were really supportive of us and the entire department, Women, Gender and Sexuality was really supportive of us and they bought the movie for us. That was really great just to have that kind of support and to start off my year with the feeling that we had that kind of level of institutional support behind us - that was really great. It was a great success, we had a lot of students, which I was surprised to see that many students because the topic is kind of obscure and I was able to make a connection with the Pride Center. So there were a lot of things that made it really special. In winter term I had two events also, one of them was about Guantanamo Bay.

I was really glad to have that, not because…I’m always weary of my position at the cultural center and I’m always kind of critical, not critical, but I’m always thinking about what it means to be an institution on campus rather than a student group. What kind of strings come attached with that, what kind of line we have to tow as an institution on campus that receives money from the school, specifically which receives student fees. What does that mean, what kinds of programming are we allowed to do, and with that I didn’t feel like I was pushing the line, but I felt like this is a topic we don’t engage with a lot and I was glad to get institutional support in that. My co-workers here were very supportive and I managed to make a really close connection with the people at the new cultural center, which will be coming online next year at the Ettihad cultural center. That meant a lot to me on an institutional level, and it was really great to have that conversation, I feel like that was a really important issue to discuss. The other event was “Black Power, Yellow Peril” and that was about seeing the connections and the histories of solidarity between Asian Americans and the Black Liberation Movement and that was really great also for all the reasons I already listed you know I got to build a connection with them and we got to really explore this hidden history. Yeah, so I’ve only just started planning events and stuff for this course nothing has really come up yet but I’m sure my events will be significant to me also.
NF: Wonderful, so you mentioned this a little bit in terms of scheduling challenges and sort of finding what the line is in terms of the projects you can do being an institution, but can you expand a little bit on that? Or share some of your challenges: what they have been and how you overcame them?

MS: Yeah, a challenge that, like I said before has always been in my specific position because I have to work with all these other people. Scheduling is a challenge, even emailing is a challenge, I’m sure everyone knows this, emailing is a challenge - just getting in contact with people just sometimes just isn’t the easiest thing in the world. So that was definitely a challenge and the way you overcome it, and I think it’s important for future student worker employees to know this, that the way that we do it, is, the way that we overcome it I feel is consistency and making, and by constancy I mean if you can email reply to it or at least make a note that you can reply to it, and don’t, and by and by constancy I mean don’t suddenly reply, don’t - one minute you get a minute then the next you reply then next you get a reply and then for five hours you disappear. Like that, you know, the constancy is in, you know, making sure you thought through the email and giving yourself enough time to think about it and making that you know that contact, and also, I cannot, I cannot stress this enough but physically being in the other centers when you are planning events, physically going there and being in those spaces, that’s really important. We cannot, I cannot emphasis that enough. Email and phone calls and weekly meetings those things are great but nothing takes the place of just going there touching base, seeing what’s up, see maybe why things go wrong. I can give an example about this, I had a problem with when I was planning my event with the Black Cultural Center during their heritage month there was a mistake on the flyer and so someone from Diversity Development called me and said, “You know we’re getting conflict-, you know, the, the program plan that you submitted doesn’t match up with the information that was on the flyer so we want to know, you know, what’s up?” So I knew that I hadn’t made a mistake when I, when I did that but I didn’t immediately jump to conclusions and say, “Oh you know, they’re wrong” - No, I went I checked my email and made sure that they had received the right information then I went to the Black Cultural center and said, “You know I just got this call you know what’s going on?” And they actually explained to me that there was a mix-up that there was a typo they had gotten two - there were two events one was right above the other and the time from the bottom one had just been taken. So it’s about stuff like that, it’s about, making sure that you’re there and making sure you’re touching base, keeping in touch that’s a very important thing to do. But the other, the other, challenges that I have faced here were just, a major problem that we always face is how do we get students to come to events that aren’t necessarily, like I said before, culturally minded type things. So in the past week I had an event, it was called “Queering the API Movement” and I did it with the Pride Center. And it was about recognizing our LGBTQ API figures where they are in our history and kind of contemplating why they’ve been erased from our history.
And we also had a calligraphy workshop in the same week and you could compare the attendance in those. We got a lot more people at the calligraphy workshop than we did at this one. And I don’t, I am afraid that this might come off as condescending, I don’t mean it in that way, but how do we get students, because these issues are important so how do we engage students how do we meet students at their level you know? It’s not that, I, I don’t think that calligraphy workshops aren’t important, no, of course, no, of course they are very important for us we are a cultural center it is import to us to make sure that students have, have, have a veritable material connection with their culture that we provide. But also how do we engage students, especially, yeah how do we engage students with issues that are different than those? How do we engage in issues of social justice? I mean how do we do that? That’s a major challenge. And it’s not just my events, you know, we’ve had events throughout the year we had another one about, I think it was about, about a generation? Like generational gaps, and even that one you could see the same planners the same people who planned that went and planned the calligraphy workshop and you could just see the differences in attendance and in audience participation in those kind of things. So a major challenge has been how do we meet students at their level you know, how do we engage the students at their level. How do we engage them in these issues and I don’t have the answer to that unfortunately. But that is a challenge that, school wide, country wide, you know it’s an issue that all of use as students, as student leaders and employs is something that we have all grappled with and it’s something that I hoped that, in my work here next here I hope to really kind of work on that.

NF: Great, so what do you consider your successes working at the APCC?

MS: My successes…well, like I say I have been able to plan other events with a lot of great people who are working in all the other cultural resources centers - that will always be a success for me. I guess another success is that…another success I would say that I was able to get to know a lot of people in the API people in the community that I didn’t know before. We made a – and not just within the API community - the Oregon State University community in general that isn’t specific to the cultural resource centers you know, we make a lot of contacts we have or least I have in the past made a lot of contacts with the people at ASOSU and the HSIC, so it’s just been great to meet all these different people and especially since I will be working here next year it’s great have those connections and to know all those institutions know those peoples. So that’s a major success I think, and I think just, I think everything we, as trite as it sounds, I think that everything we do here is a success. No matter how well attended our events are, no matter how well our reviews are you know, no matter what I think everything we do here, everything we do here is a successes in its own right. And I feel a lot about my
work and feel everything I have done in my work has gone well and I am satisfied with it.

NF: Great, so this next question in terms of your interactions with staff from the other culture centers, it’s your job to interact with the other cultural centers. Do you mostly interact with the other centers with people that are in your same position? Or do you go to other events even when you have nothing to do with them or do you meet with the other staff members what are those other types of interactions like?

MS: That’s a good question. Mainly my interactions with the other staff are with the other community coordinators just by virtue of my position. But I do always enjoy attending other centers events. I tried to - I was my, my work schedule and my class schedule was a lot friendlier at the beginning of the year so I was able to go to a lot back in fall. I was not able to go to too many in winter. I have been going to more in this term you know, I was just at the drag show and I was the Ettihad Fair and I have been to some other events and I’ve been to other events – APACU over the past month also - APASU is the Asian Pacific American Student Union. So that’s all, that’s all been really nice but, I would say that I’ve, I have the privilege in my position that I am able to go to those other centers and meet those people and you know when you’re there, even though I mainly interact with the community outreach coordinator of that specific center, of course there are going to be other student employees there, there’s going to be other people there, so I have been able to reach out to all these different people just because I’ll be physically in a different center and that’s been really nice.

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So yeah, I would say that my interactions with staff from the other centers has been high over the past year and that’s been really nice and I hope that, I hope that with our reorganization of student positions next year that that element doesn’t, doesn’t go away. I hope students can still do that because, you know, like I said before we are a family here at the Diversity Development and it’s really easy to forget that when were all in our separate buildings. But it’s really important that we are all connected, we are all under the same umbrella, but also we all share the common mission to work with students of color on campus and other underprivileged students on campus. So I hope that that aspect of my job doesn’t go away but rather gets diluted.

NF: That’s great; so let’s talk about the new center. The APCC had its groundbreaking ceremony earlier this term. So can you talk a little about your role in the new center? If you had a role and what the new center means to you?
MS: So for the design process, I was not a part of the process. For that I was able, because I was working at Diversity Development, I was able to look at the sketches, I was able to kind of see it - not as it was forming because I came on the team a little late. But I got to see it as the design was being solidified of course in the past year we have had the blue prints here so we’ve been able to look at them. So I haven’t been a major part of the design process. I spoke at ground breaking - that was really nice. But other than that, the new center, what the new center means to me. That’s a really big question [laughs]. The new center is I think…its, the new center is…it’s something that the University, it’s something that the University did not give to us but it’s something that the University, it’s something that we worked for and something that we were owed. Because the University, the University has issued a covenant that has been signed by the former president I believe. But the University signed to the covenant it commitment to the culture resource centers on campus - that’s a commitment to us, it’s a commitment to our thriving; it’s a commitment to being a presence on campus. So when I think about the new center, the new center is really the University honoring the commitment they have already made to us. That is a commitment that was made because the University, because students and concerned faculty spoke up how about, about problems that were going about the cultural resource centers and the University. So the University did not give this center to us it is a product of a long time of hard work. It is a major success for us, it’s like I just said, it’s taken so many students and so many faculty that we don’t even know all of their names. So it’s, it’s all that, it’s the product of their work, so for us especially, those of us who are staying on the APCC for next year it’s a really big honor to get the center at this time and be able to hopefully be the first staff to work at this center. That’s so huge. I can’t emphasis enough how much, how you know, how blessed we are that we are able to work in the new center. So the new center is like I said it’s the University honoring its commitment but also something that we got and it’s something we need to use and because all these students and all these faculty members have worked so hard for it, it’s something that we need to use well, so the new center is kind of like a trust, you know? It is a symbol of the trust that those, that those people have put in us and we need to honor that trust by doing our best and working for them, working for ourselves, and working for the people who are going to come after us. The new center means a lot to me and I am really excited to hopefully be one of the first people to work in it. That’s a huge honor.

NF: So a couple things to follow up. Can you talk a little bit about your role in the ground breaking ceremony - if you were selected or did you volunteer to speak at that?

MS: Sure, I was asked to speak at the ground breaking ceremony because in the initial, in the planning stages of how the program would look we didn’t have a major student voice speaking. I am also going to be the student leadership liaison which replaces the external and internal coordinator of this year. So I will be the student leadership liaison
for next year so that’s kind of, it’s kind of a big position, it’s a high you know, it’s one of the two highest positions at the center so it was a honor to be asked but it was kind of like, because I will be taking on a leadership role here next year they also wanted my input into what it meant to me. So yeah, I was asked to speak. I did a really short, I think it was only two or three minutes long at the very end, yeah.

[00:25:32]

NF: Great, and can you talk a little bit about the significance of the center moving location. Because the other three centers are staying were they originally were but the APCC is moving towards the center of campus. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MS: Well like I said it’s the University honoring its commitment it already made to students. The current location of the APCC is really not, it is nowhere near the center of campus. We are, we are one of the, I think we are farthest northwest of something you can really go on campus; we’re an outlier, we’re on the other side of a parking lot. So it’s even really difficult for us to guide people to get here. I know the first time I, I was walking here my freshmen year I got lost, you know. And I know it’s kind of funny but it’s a fact that a lot of the students get lost coming here unfortunately it is because we are so far. But like I said it’s the community honoring and the University honoring its commitment to us by moving us closer to campus. It’s, especially where we’ll be located, its right next to the NAL, it will be down the road from the four Cs, it’s you know, it’s a really prime position. It’s right next to the memorial union and the quad. It’s a really good position to be in so I am looking forward to having us so close on campus. I hope to get, to boost our attendance at events but also to boost our traffic just in general. I hope that once were more of a presence on campus students, especially API students, will see us more and gain that visibly and well get more people to come and use our resources. So yeah, so that’s, the new location is really important and its, and it was something that I think a lot of us really appreciated about the move. If the university was going to build a new structure here, we still would have been, we still would have been appreciative of it, but it wouldn’t have meant as much as it would if we were to move towards the center of campus were going to be at the heart of what’s going on.

NF: So this next set of questions is all about ideas for the future and the bigger picture. Which is wonderful that you are going to continue working here next year. So looking back, and also recommending for the future and this can be specific to you or it can be ideas in general. What projects, events, or activities would you have like to have seen? So what would you recommend for the future?
MS: What I would have liked to see...well, I would have liked for us to have collaboration with all the other centers this year that would have been really nice so I hope that next year that with the new student positions I hope that they will be able to work with all the other centers. So I hope that is something that I, I really hope for. What I would like to see, what I would like to see more of next year, and hopefully I myself can be a part of this is more of a connection between the APCC and the API student groups on campus. We have a, we have eighteen different API student groups and organizations, so that’s a lot and I would just, and we all, all of us regularly meet up and you know, so there is connection there but I would like to see more and I would like to see closer, I would like to see more you know just some more of that connection, just build more of a relationship, solidify the fact. I feel like that on our end, we are an institution on campus, it you know, it’s undeniable we have paid staff we you know, were a responsible, in we have a hierarchy we have people responsible you know within our own institution and within the University in general. So were very bureaucratic in that way and I understand that’s, and I at least that’s what I believe is a major cause of the gap between us.

Because a lot of individual staff, myself included, have really close friendships and relationships with a lot of individual members of clubs but I wonder how we can bring that onto an institutional level. How can we as the APCC work closely with all these student groups because we are really here for them this is our job. So next year I would really like to build that relationship. I would like to see it, as far as events and activates go, we had a lot of really good things um, this year unfortunately, unfortunately we didn’t have anything about…oh no, we did hit it, so never mind about that. But I would like to see, we have done a lot of physical events, that’s the wrong way to put it, but we have a lot of, well we have had two, or we will have two we have a type 2 workshop and we had a hip-hop workshop back in fall. But I would like to see also a kind of a health minded events specifically with health disparities within our community. We table at the red dress fashion show, which raises money for the cause of people suffering with HIV/AIDS. So we have that connection there but I would like to see a full fledged event about that because health is major concern in our community and is something that we need to focus on. Other than that, I would also, I would also like to see, more events...I don’t want to say that I would like to see more social justice type events, but I would like to see our staff kind of integrate those into the programming that we regularly do anyway, so no matter what it is, if it’s something like a hip hop workshop, you know how can we, there is a history behind hip hop you know, there are a lot of issues behind it how can we bring that to the forefront. And it was brought to the forefront which is something that I really appreciated but how do we do that with all of our activities so that’s something that I want to keep in mind for next year.
NF: So what advice would you give future APCC staff or just other OSU cultural center staff in general?

MS: The advice that I want to give all the future APCC staff specifically and that will this be up for next year? Ok, at least that over the summer, I will send this down to the staff and hopefully listen to it. What I want all the APCC staff to remember is that this was not an easy year for us as API students. We lost two of our, two major faculty members who were the sources of huge amounts of institutional advocacy for us. We so that really hit us hard, in terms of our ability to, and that will continue to hit us hard into the next year, just in our ability to foster like, like those two members, those two faculty members, they supervised clubs, one of them was the associated director of the Diversity Development the other was the head of the API Education Office, the API student services. So these were major positions that were held by Asian women on campus and to lose that, and not those positions won’t be replaced by those same people so we don’t have that level of institutional advocacy and support anymore. So what I want students to remember for next year, for the next, for the coming years also, is that working at the APCC I think a lot of students think it’s a lot of fun and it’s been a great time, and I would never say that working here has not been fulfilling. But it is also a position that comes with a lot, all of the cultural centers, it is a position that comes with a lot of responsibility it is a position that comes with, yeah that’s the exact way to put it I think, it’s a position that comes with responsibility. Yeah, that’s how I’d put it, it’s a position that comes with responsibility. As I have said multiple times already, we are an institution we have the ability to go, you know hopefully we will be getting ASOSU representation next year, we have the ability to do a lot of things just because we are a recognized part of the campus in the way that student organizations aren’t. So that means it’s our responsibility that when issues come up with API students or with students of color in general that we are there and we are supporting them and that we are at the forefront. And what that means also that, that all future staff and what future staff need to remember is that we are not just this job working here is not just you know, it’s not just a good time and it’s not just for - it’s not just something cool to put on your resume it’s not just something to show that you, you know have cultural competency it’s not about, this isn’t about, this is a position that means a lot to a lot of people and it’s a position that you need to be constantly thinking when you’re in this position about what it means to be in this position in general and what it means to be a student leader.

You know what it means to have that power what it means to have that ability, those abilities. So my recommendation is to, my advice to all future APCC staff is to really think about that and when you think about that and make sure that becomes a part of the programming that you do and part of the work that you do make it apart of your life. Because we here at the APCC, you know we are probably never, at least not in the
short run, were not going to be recuperate the institutional loss that we have suffered this year. So it’s important for us as student leaders to step up our game and to make sure that we are filling in that gap for our students.

NF: And so just to follow up the two positions that were both women moved on to other positions it was Victoria (Nguyen) and Sandy (Tsuneyoshi), correct?

MS: Yes.

NF: So can you expand just a little bit more on that, in terms of the significance of having API role models and leadership. And what happens when you don’t have that?

MS: Well anyone can tell you Aunty Sandy and Victoria have always been there for students of color in general, but they have specifically worked with us as the API students. Not having…well not having those people there means that a lot of things that the University might do that we might be unaware of here, we don’t have those people who are in the mix of it at all times. So you know, the things you know, things might come up with our budget, things might come up with the kind of programing we want to do, things might come up with the funding for our student groups you know, just these kind of things on an institutional level and I am really speaking at an institutional level here because I think that it’s important to remember that they were working at a institution. You know those things that come up you know, were very insulated from them as student workers. Losing that means the loss of people who will say, “Wait, you know you can’t do that” or “Wait, you forgot about this” you know, in a way that we can’t over here. So losing Victoria and Aunty Sandy I mean, that on that level it’s really hard but also, of course Aunty Sandy and Victoria are always going to apart of the community you know, there still very much involved with everything we do here. But just, but losing, losing them as constant physical presences on campus and that I have to say that was a little bit demoralizing over the past year its, it hasn’t been easy to kind of, it hasn’t been easy to lose that to just lose the fact that you know, there were these strong wonderful caring API women who were really leading the charge on so many things. Victoria was our boss, like it cannot be denied that she was always she always fought for us as cultural resource centers in general it can’t, we can’t ever forget about that. So I mean losing them has physical presences on campus that has really I think, at least on a personal level that really hit me hard especially because I worked really close with Victoria that that really hit me, but losing that I think has kind of, it’s kind of shook all of us especially with all the changes that are occurring within the APCC all the changes that are going within the Intercultural Student Services and how that affects student groups its hit all of us and not to have them there as a kind of stabilizing forces that’s been really difficult. So and its even, it’s been a little bit more difficult knowing that we won’t be able to get back people with their experience and their knowledge and their just, just their position on campus. So that’s been really tough, but I’m optimistic
because I think that students will rise to the challenge and hopefully in the next year, of course we have the new professional staff at the APCC and I know that we as a, as a community of cultural resource centers, we are going to come out of this better and I am sure within the APCC and all the API student groups I already see it you know, people are really taking the charge and stepping up and taking on more responsibility so even though it hit us hard I am confident in our resilience.

NF: So based on working here at the APCC, what is the take away if you can’t just think of one, you can name more if you like, that you have gained that you would like to share with others?

MS: The main takeaway that I have gained in the past year is that, is that we really are part of a community here, not just here within specific community that we serve or within just the cultural resource centers or even just students of color here at Oregon State University, but we really are part a larger movement of students of color and people of color across the country. This is, it’s really easy to kind of forget about it because you know, for a lot of reasons it’s really easy to just forget that were part of a collective movement - that were fighting for common goals with a lot of other people. And so that has been the biggest takeaway. I was able to go three different conferences over the past year and just to be in places with all the other students, you’re all working towards the same thing it really reminds you that the work were doing here that’s important. And that’s the major takeaway and that’s something that you know, if I could go back to the last question, it’s something that I want future staff to remember the work that we do here is very important it’s not, it’s not work that you know, it’s not just what you do here it’s not just done and it vanishes it dissipates or something you know the work we do here it lays foundations for future students for future people you know in general. So it’s been really wonderful to feel a part of that greater community but it’s also I think that’s something that we need to keep in mind.

NF: So in a way you’ve answered this, but what is your biggest issue in terms of the purpose of the APCC? Why is it important that the University uphold its covenant? Why is it important that the APCC be institutional as you have mentioned.

MS: So the biggest issue in terms of purpose with the APCC, the biggest issue, could you explain kind of what you mean about biggest issue?

NF: Well, why do you think why that APCC should exist, as a physical center, as a part of the University on an institutional level as you’ve been describing it - why is that? So if you had to state your case to someone who said, “Why do we need cultural centers?” Maybe someone at a university who doesn’t have them, why would you say that you need them?
MS: Ok, well I think that we have, with the construction of all the new centers we have faced that question of “why do we need these cultural centers? Why do we need new cultural centers? Why is the University building these cultural centers?” And of course those students are also and just people in general are forgetting that at the same time the University is building a new APCC we are also receiving a new college of business and a new first year experience center and a new student dorm. So, and we just completed construction on the new international living learning center in just the past couple years. So the, and the biggest issue of that question, and to answer the question that I have gotten and I know that a lot of other people have gotten is that its, it speaks from a place of ignorance that it seems that the university is just giving this to us it seems that we haven’t done anything to receive these, to receive this center or the other center it seems that the University is just donating this to us and of course that is not the case at all. But the biggest reason that we need cultural centers and what I have and what I will always say to people who ask this question is that there is no drawback to having these cultural centers on campus. Everyone has benefited from a diverse campus in which all students are respected and all students have the ability to pursue their educational, personal, professional goals to their fullest extent. Nobody is harmed, everybody benefits from this fact. And for the question of why do we specifically need these cultural centers you know, that also speaks from a place of ignorance because of course students of color, you know when we don’t have these spaces for advocacy, when we don’t have committed student employees and committed faculty members who are willing to do and are willing to put in the time and effort and energy into working for students of color, students of color become marginalized I think at a rapid and alarming speed.

Even with these cultural centers you know, our University is the only one in the state that has specific cultural centers for each different racial group. So in the whole state usually places just have multicultural centers. So even with the presence of all these different cultural centers you know, I would say that we are a fairly visible presence even with that we still face problems, that not to say that these problems go away. In the past five months you know we’ve had to deal with some really awful stuff happening, you know racist messages written on the walls, racists messages given to other cultural centers, you know these things don’t magically disappear because, students of color, issues won’t go away just because we have these cultural centers. And that makes it even more important to have them here for us to be able to respond to them. And I would say that also its really important to remember that these cultural centers, it’s something that people misconstrue a lot, these cultural centers aren’t clubs - we are actively working for students, our main goal to retain students you know, specifically at the APCC we have a problem, well not a problem, but our community is very diverse and so you know, and the dropout rates even in high school for Pacific
Islander students or Southeast Asian students particularly, and this is a general rule, particularly students who are the children or who are themselves first generation of immigrants or refugees who come from war torn areas or have come from displaced regions of the world. That is something that, that is something that we need to work on these cultural centers aren’t here so we can have a club house they’re not here so that we can have a good time. No were here to work for students we need to make sure were serving, were here to serve students and were serving them in the best way possible for them. So that is a really big answer I think to that question, but there’s a lot of issues and there’s a lot of things going into why this center and other cultural centers are very important.

NF: So you’ve touched upon this, with that previous answer, but can you go a little bit more in-depth in terms of the impact of the APCC on Asian Pacific Islander students here on campus?

MS: I would say that, API students, at least the ones I have been able to make connections with over here, I think that they like having this place just because it’s a place that recognizes them; it’s a place that gives them visibility that I think they would have otherwise been denied. I think it’s also for a lot of API students, especially other API student leaders on campus it’s also just like is, like I have been saying it’s a physical representation of a commitment that the University has made to us and it’s really important that the University is honoring the commitment and work that our predecessors have made. So, and I think on a moral level it’s just nice to just come here sometimes you know? It’s, even like I said right before this this is not a club house but this is a place that students come to meet other students, lounge around and just sort of feel at home and feel accepted, feel like it’s a place for them. That just a major thing on just like a psychological level I think that API students just feel better because we exist.

NF: So you’ve mentioned that your projects and your events are for the greater OSU and local communities. So can you describe the impact of the APCC on the larger OSU community and perhaps even beyond that the Corvallis area community?

MS: On the greater OSU community I would say that, were just, were one of like as a, it’s already known, were one of six official cultural resource centers on campus. I remember when we had the “I too am OSU” student march you know that was organized the centers around moving between the different cultural centers. And that was really symbolic to me about what this, this place means like on a school level you know, these cultural resource centers, and even the APCC this, they are places for us to, to build power and to share experiences and to feel you know, just to feel safe and to feel like we can have a say and we can, you know we can you now, it’s a place to promote ourselves. So on the greater OSU community just to have them, just to have the
march come all the way out here that’s really symbolic and that’s students recognizing that this is a place that they can come and students recognize that this is a place serving students of color. And that’s the biggest impact I think it’s had on the greater OSU community and that’s true, not just for the APCC, but for all the cultural resource centers. Within the local community, it’s a little bit difficult to make contact with the local community just because, well just because it’s a little bit difficult to make contact with them in general. It’s just difficult to you know, where do we advertise how do we intentionally go about advertising ourselves to them. But I would say that some of the events that other cultural groups put on, those are really community events for instance the luau we had last month that was really well attended, not just by students or faculty of Oregon State but the entire Corvallis community. So that was something that hit the broader community.

NF: And do you have any suggestions or ideas in terms of future collaborations with the broader OSU and local communities so outside of, in addition to working with the cultural centers.

MS: I would love for us and I think that this is something that I hope; this is something I hope to work on. I would we have an advisory board here that is of faculty on campus and of some community members. But what I would like to do is see more of a connection between the work that we as students do here at the cultural centers and within the cultural groups and faculty. Specifically the faculty of programs like ethnic studies, women gender sexuality studies, queer studies, anthropology - these departments whose work revolves around us. I would like to see us have more of a connection with them - you know, their work really does, especially with ethnic studies with the APCC it’s really wonderful to have the ethnic studies program in place and I know a lot of API students take ES 231 or 233 which are the Asian American studies courses. A lot of them are just, their awareness of our history and our current issues are just magnified because of that. I would like to see more of a connection built between us and the faculty. And I think that through that we get to the greater community because you know, like with the example of my collaboration with queer studies back in the fall having that connection with the professor in queer studies that brought people to my event that got us exposure you know, and that gave legitimacy to the work that we do here and that’s really important. The faculty I think, because their support legitimizes the work that we do and our support of them particularly for programs like ethnic studies whose funding is always really precarious our support of them is really crucial. Ethnic studies programs were only developed because of students of color in the 60s and through the third world liberation front we fought for ethnic studies programs. So we need to continually build and continue to maintain building relationships with them and that’s a major thing that I see with the OSU community. With the local community it’s a little bit difficult to think of what I want to do with the local community - like I said they show up to these really kind of big events, big cultural shows that we do and
that’s really good and I think that’s the relationship I would like to have with them at the moment. I would like to kind of, you know, if there are any local organizations that are working with people of color I would like for us to seek those out and see how we can build together. For the moment I think that we have the appropriate relationship with the local community.

NF: Can you describe your thoughts on why, if you think this, if you think that sharing your stories is an important part of your identity and why you think it’s important to share your history and the history of the APCC?

MS: It’s really important for us to share this story and I think for us to share this story of the APCC so that students don’t forget that this was something that students fought for and students worked for and you know, when we forget the history of the APCC it becomes just another building on campus, just something else the University just a little house on the corner on campus that the University decided to buy one day.

Well of course that wasn’t the case; the University was intentionally acquired through the deliberate work of students and when we remember that, we remember that we need to always be advocating for ourselves and for other students. I think there was an example that was just shared with me recently about some money that because, of course ISS’s structural change are going on, Intercultural Student Services, is going through several structural changes and there was some money that we’re looking at to use as just an end of year celebration and we’re wondering was going to go at the moment. And Aunty Sandy shared this with me right before this and showed me that this was something that students really intentionally acquired from, I can’t remember his name but he was the president back in 2002 or something, but back then after a particularly racist incident had occurred on campus, it was in 1996, students went to the president and asked for and acquired money so that we could use this for general, for programs that are outside just budget that the APCC receives. And you know we were just thinking about that money and we were thinking that, “Oh it might go away and what are we going to do about the end of year celebration and how are we going to have that?” And Aunty Sandy reminded us that that was money that the students worked for and that kind of gave a lot of us, it gave me especially the motivation that we need to get that money we need to secure that money. And that’s just a general thing you know when we remember that when students, when we remember the work that students do and why we’re here and what we need to fight for. On a general level sharing stories, I see a lot of power in sharing stories, sharing stories really struggles the hegemonic narratives they really you know, it really gives us visibility that we want, if that makes sense. And not visibility, not the visibility that harms us, visibility that we intentionally seek out and provide for ourselves. So that’s really important. I
myself I think that sharing stories is something that is really good, like I went to the racial aikido retreat back in January and that was a really great time for a lot of students to share their experiences being students of color and just being people of color and navigating those spaces. I remember that I didn’t share many personal stories just because, not that I didn’t feel comfortable or safe because that was a really wonderful group of people, but because I didn’t really feel like sharing stories was a way for me personally to build power but I recognize and I love that it’s a way for all these other students to. So sharing stores is really important and it’s just a way for us to you know, to recognize commonality and build solidarity.

NF: So you’ve described a couple of incidents that occurred this year pertaining to some issues in terms of racial and ethnic identities and unfortunately some issues and incidents of racial intolerance. So could you describe those experiences? Those were more general experiences and if you want to share any of your personal experiences?

MS: Well, I think Oregon State University, I think most students at Oregon State University have kind of a, I don’t want to say warped, but they have a little bit of skewed idea of what the University looks like. And I think it’s because the University of course in the past ten years has been made a very obvious and deliberate effort to recruit students from out of the country and out of the state. I think a third of the campus is out of state, something like 20 to 30 percent of the campus is drawn from outside of Oregon.

And that wasn’t some, that wasn’t; I think that students think that was something that just happened because it just happened. But no, that was a deliberate effort made by the University. So when students say things like, “Oh there you know, there are a lot of Chinese people now, there are a lot of Arab students” - that’s coming from a place of ignorance because that was something that the University intentionally set out to do. Not just because having a diverse campus benefits everyone but because you know there is greater profit to be made from out of state students. Because out of state students pay triple tuition, they help fund the APCC through their tuition money. This is money that is just money that the University went out specifically to go get. So that is a major thing that students often forget that the racial makeup on campus is still overwhelmingly white and that it just so happens that because we tend to associate white students with neutral we associate them with kind of being the default. These other students, students of color, specifically students of color who come from out of the country and who because they come from out of the country tend to just stick together you know, it’s a natural thing to want to do. That they become, these students become so much more visible, and it’s not these students’ fault – I’d never say that - it just so happens that because, it just so happens that they are just more visible and it just becomes this kind of spiral of, “Oh, there seem to be a lot more students of color on
campus, that must mean that’s why they are building the new cultural centers. Oh, look at all these things that are being diverted from us.” And it’s like, and it ignores everything that I have been saying about the intentional work that students have done and the work, and the specific you know, the specific goal of the University in recruiting out of state students which has, it’s a major thing the University has done. I remember I was remarking to one of my coworkers you know we have a lot of students from Hawaii here, why does so many students from Hawaii? It just seems like Oregon, the climate of Oregon is so much different from Hawaii why would students come here. Oh, the University goes and makes sure it’s a presence in Hawaii. So it’s, its, it come from a place of ignorance and a very dangerous ignorance that students ask, “Why do we have all these, you know, all these students of color? Why do we have all these immigrants?” And that, and unfortunately, that reinforces the racism and phobia that is already present in this country, that’s a really general thing that I observe. But on a specific level I think that there’s a tendency among students and it’s not just a tendency. I think Oregon is a very well, at least western Oregon, is in its own way a very “liberal” area and unfortunately “liberalism” I guess comes with its pitfalls. The University makes a really big effort to promote multiculturalism and diversity and somehow, in, I think a lot of students’ mindset that – that becomes equated with anti-racist work - it’s not necessarily. It’s certainly, it’s certainly advantages but it doesn’t necessarily mean we’re undoing those structures. And so when, so like I said when students see all these students of color, the immediate thought is they’re getting benefits, they’re getting advantages, they are getting things that we aren’t getting and that’s dangerous way for a lot of students to think because those, you know, whether or not students believe it, student have power on this campus you know - students who think we have too many student of color that influences the hiring processes, admissions processes, that changes things for us, so that’s what I see a lot of. There’s a huge emphasis that the University places on multicultural and diversity and not enough of an emphasis on actually you know working on you know, working on undoing racism, undoing sexism, and homophobia, and all these things. So that’s I think that’s a really those are really general points, but I think they become replicated in the way that a lot of students just go about their day, “Oh a new” – I remember last year someone was like, “Oh, there’s a new longhouse; oh, why is there a new longhouse?” And the irony is so prevalent because the new longhouse is right there but of course the new college of business is being built right across the street from it, but no one is asking, “Why are we getting a new college of business? It seems like there are more college of science students then there are college of business, right? And there are more agriculture students, more forestry students - why are we getting a new college?” No one is asking that question, but everyone’s asking, “Why are we getting a new longhouse?” And, I would like this to be on the record [laughs] - you know the longhouse was basically this little trailer thing on the corner of what was it 26th and Jefferson for what, 30 years or something? That’s, that’s nothing – that was a pittance – the University – that isn’t the University honoring commitment to diversity, that’s the University, you know, superficially honoring.
superficially paying lip service to it. Building the new center is honoring a commitment and that’s just something that students need to start reflecting on a lot, you know, it’s not alright to be ignorant of these issues and of – you know, our University looks the way it does because of really deliberate decisions made by specific people and specific organizations on campus and so when you think about, “Oh, why are there so many immigrant students or so many foreign students? You know, it’s something the University wanted and I think we also need to stop this idea that students of color – you know it’s an idea that we have a lot in this country – that when people of color get something, we have only got it because we took it from the white majority and that’s not the case. We did not take anything from other students by building a new Asian Pacific Cultural Center, in fact everyone is going to be benefited because we live – we go to a university that has an Asian Pacific Cultural Center – everyone is going to be benefitted because we’re working on undoing these systems and gaining you know, long – these advantages that have been denied to students of color for a very long – historically denied to students of color. So you know, those are, like I said, those are really general things, but that’s kind of what I see here.

NF: That’s great, thank you. So, and you mentioned the Solidarity March that took place, that the APCC was one of the stops on that march – can you talk a little bit about either your role or the APCC role of that and did you go and participate in the march? Or can you just talk about your experience with that?

MS: I wasn’t a huge part of the march, but I was able to join for a little bit, but I had class during that time. I had a – I think I had a midterm during that time – so I wasn’t a huge part of that and I would never want to claim any sort of major role in that because that was done by a lot of other students particularly out community relations facilitators on campus, you know, they really – and people who work within housing and dining and people in the other cultural centers – those were the people who really stepped up. But with the Solidarity March, that was just really nice to see in general. It was just nice to see students you know really working together. And I have to say that that was – there were a lot of things that were really good about that march but there were some things that – not some things that I disagree with but some things that I was a little weary of. So, and I don’t know, this is going to go on the record, so this might sound bad, but I remember that President Ed Ray showed up to join the march for a little bit – I wasn’t there during the time he was there, but he was there at the march for a little bit – and I remember, I remember when I saw the paper, The Barometer came out the next day with a whole thing about the march and his picture was there and I said, “Well, hmmm, you know, President Ed Ray has the power to help us out a lot, you know him going to the march is great, but how, how is he going to translate his attendance at the march to actual work?” You know, and that was something that – and of course the march, the march is just, I think people put a lot of emphasis on marches, you know, because they’re so obvious and so visible, but the march is just the most visible
component, you know “I too am OSU” has, you know, continued – they built a lot of spaces for community dialogue, you know, in responding to certain, in responding to the recent, the homophobic comments made by a candidate who was running for ASOSU president, you know, they really stepped up, I think within the next day after that article came out there was already a space for community – that dialogue about what was going on, you know, “how can we strategize? What should we do? How can we help each other heal?” So, you know, obviously the march, the march is just one part of a broader movement on campus so that’s how I see it and I hope that, I hope that because I think a lot of, it’s always really lovely to see people, to see faculty attend. I remember I saw at the community dialogue after the, after the comments made by the ASOSU candidate, you know, I saw at the dialogue Dr. Allison Davis White-Eyes of Intercultural Student Services attending – and it was really just nice to see her there, you know, she did a lot of great work with us and that was, it was really empowering just to see her, just to see her be there. But I always, but I don’t want to say suspicious, but I’m always a little weary of when people, when faculty especially, when they come out, and I wonder what, how they’re going to translate that into actual support for us. And I can give you an example because in the last Solidarity March and at the, after those comments were made the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexualities actually issued two statements, one for each event that, you know, it was a statement of solidarity and it was signed by all the faculty members of the department and that was a department and that was just amazing to see that – that is something, you know, that is translating their presence at the march, their presence at the dialogue into something, you know, something feasible, that’s power – that’s having faculty who are willing to advocate for us. So that was wonderful to see.

NF: So is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to add or anything that we’ve talked about that you want to expand on?

MS: Not really. I think I’ve already mentioned this but I’m very excited for the new center. It’s a wonderful time to be at OSU and it’s a wonderful time to be working at the center and I just, you know, I just feel like I need to, I really do need to name and honor the work that all these other students have done in making it possible for us to even be talking about this new center. So I’m really excited and really honored to be able to work there and I hope that everything goes smoothly with it. And just in general I hope that for next year, you know, I hope that with all the changes, and with everything that we as an API community have gone through over the past year, you know, I hope that we can emerge from it stronger. Yeah.

NF: Wonderful. Thank you.

MS: Thank you.