Oral History Transcript
CSUN Leaders
Interviewee Dianne Harrison = DH
Interviewed by Jessica Kim = JK
Interview conducted on April 27, 2021 via remote video conferencing technology
Transcribed by Steve Kutay
Total Time: 01:55:19

JK: So today is Tuesday, April 27 (2021). This is Jessica Kim. I'm in Los Angeles, California on a Zoom call today with President Emerita Dianne Harrison, who's joining us from the state of Washington, and we are about to begin recording her oral history. This interview will become part of the campus leadership oral history project. President Harrison served as president of California State University, Northridge from 2012 through early 2020-21. As president she prioritized advancing student success, fostering diversity and inclusion, increasing the visibility and reputation of the university, growing the university's donor base, expanding research activity and sponsored programs, supporting sustainability, and using athletics as a tool for engagement. Prior to her role at California State University, Northridge, she served as president of California State University, Monterey Bay from 2006 to 2012. The first 30 years of her career she spent at Florida State University from 1976 to 2006. She began as a faculty member in the School of Social Work before advancing to serve as dean of social work, dean of graduate studies, associate vice president for Academic Affairs, and then vice president for Academic Quality and External Programs. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree in American Studies which she received in 1971, and an MSW (Master of Social Work], which she received in 1973, both from the University of Alabama. She went on to earn a PhD [Doctor of Philosophy] in social work from Washington University in 1976.

JK: Dr. Harrison has enjoyed a distinguished career as a researcher, teacher, and administrator in higher education. She has presented and published widely on topics such as sexual health, HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] and AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome], marital quality, substance abuse, sexuality and gender, social work in higher education, gender and higher education and diversity and equity in higher education to name but some. As a leader in higher education, Dr. Harrison currently serves on the Board of the American Council on Education and as vice chair of the Board of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities. Governor Jerry Brown appointed her to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education where she served two full four-year terms, including several years as chair of the commission. While at CSUN [California State University, Northridge], President Harrison actively worked to connect the university to the broader civic community. She served on the boards of directors for the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, the Valley Economic Alliance, and Valley Presbyterian Hospital. She also served as a member of the Los Angeles Coalition for the Economy and Jobs, and as board chair of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. Finally, she

has also worked for many years with the National Collegiate Athletic Association, including serving on the association's board of governors. So, it's an honor to be with you today, President Harrison, and to have you tell your story and share your insights.

DH: Thank you.

JK: I will just start at the beginning. So, when and where were you born?

DH: I was born on New Year's Day in 1951, in Summit, New Jersey, and I was the only member of my family who was born in New Jersey. They just happened to be living there at the time.

JK: And can you tell me more about your parents and family background?

DH: Sure. Both of my parents came from low income backgrounds, they were the first generation to attend college. And my dad was a good athlete, apparently. He was able to secure a scholarship to go to college. He went to Auburn University. My mother was an RN [registered nurse] nursing student in Mobile, Alabama, where they met and married. And she actually dropped out of the RN program, two weeks before she was scheduled to graduate in order to get married, and move away with my dad. So, they ended up having seven kids and I was the fifth.

JK: And how was it growing up in a fairly large family?

DH: Well, I always, when I tell my story, and I tell my story to students a lot, actually, I say, you know, growing up in a large family, you become competitive, you become competitive about who gets the most corn or who gets the most whatever, you know, food. Who gets the most parental attention and so forth. So, it's not all bad. I think it's a lot easier as adults. Because then you have a large network to, to have support and love and work with an elderly parent, for example. But I enjoyed it. You can't change what you were, what life dealt you and I loved it. So, it was good, but it does make you competitive.

[05:03]

JK: And where did you spend most of your childhood?

DH: My family moved back and forth between Mobile, Alabama, and New Jersey. And, so during one of those back-and-forths, I happened to be born in New Jersey. And as I mentioned earlier, I was the only one in my family born there. So, immediately throughout my life, my brothers and sisters made a joke of that I was like the carpetbagger in the family from the north, you know, and, but in point of fact, we did move back and forth, many times, probably three that I recall. And I made a vow to myself that if I ever had children of my own, I wanted them to be able to

grow up without moving so much. And so, we stayed in one place for a while, in order for my kids to not have to go through what I went through, which is a lot of moves.

JK: And can you talk about some of your early experiences with education? So, your K through 12 experience?

DH: You know, I, [pauses] I really took education for granted until probably about my junior year in high school. Before then, it was just a tool for meeting people. It was a way to make friends and, you know, pass notes. And I was not a serious student at all. But I managed to make it through just, you know, B's and C's, that was about the extent of my interest. But when the last time that we moved, we moved from New Jersey to Mobile. And my parents put me and my sisters in an all-girls school. And I thought, wow, this is going to be different. And in point of fact, remember that competition I had talked about? Well, when you're in a school with only other women, girls, the competition was actually based on academic achievement. And so that's when I became interested all of a sudden, and, "Well wait a minute," you know, "I can do that too." And so I did. So, I became a little bit better student, and although my academic award was for PE [physical education], quite frankly. But anyway, I think at some point, it was always understood that college was in the future, that was just what you did. It wasn't explained why you did it, or what you were supposed to do with it, an education, but just that it was understood that that was the path. And so that was the path that I took and my mother, because of the fact that she had dropped out of her education before she got her degree, she ended up--my father passed away when I was 14, and so my mother was left in Mobile with four kids still at home. And she needed to go back to work all of a sudden. And she did, she went back to work in a hospital in Mobile, but she always complained that she was never paid what others were paid because she didn't have her degree and yet she was doing the same, practically the same jobs. So, she really impressed on me, that one, you never know what life is going to bring you. She always said “I thought I was fine. I was settled, you know your father was taking care of all of us and I didn't need to work and then all of a sudden I did need to work.” So, get your education because nobody can take that away from you. And to this day, that's a great mantra.

JK: It is. It is an ideal that had a big impact on you. Was going to college an expectation also, like with your cohort with the other young women that you were in high school with, was that something that was part of the culture at the school?

DH: It was, it was. I was very fortunate to have that, quite frankly, because you know your peer group has a huge influence. Your family has a huge influence, but your peer group also has a huge influence. And it really was the expectation that we would go.

[10:09]

JK: Were there particular subjects, so PE was one, but were there other subjects that kind of sparked your interest while you were in high school? And then share with us what the award was for, [laughs] and what your favorites sports were.

DH: [Laughs] No, nothing else piqued my interest. Yeah, I could do it. But I didn't enjoy it. I could do math, I didn't enjoy it. I could do biology, but I didn't enjoy it. And so on and so forth. I can do PE and I enjoyed it. I loved all the physicality. I did ballet, and so I was really into exercise and I guess being healthy. And so, it didn't matter if it was volleyball, or basketball, or field hockey or track or archery or gymnastics, I loved them all and engaged in them all. And so, the award was the most outstanding student in physical education, right?

JK: in many different sports, and I'm guessing that sparked a lifelong interest of yours in youth athletics and collegiate athletics.

DH: Well, interestingly, at that time, now remember we're talking about the late 60s. And women's sports were still relegated to--I wouldn't even call it second class citizenship, I would call it third or fourth class. It was like an add on. And so, I will tell our female student athletes this through the years that many of us who love to compete and who loved sports, never thought, never even entered our mind that we would do that in college. It wasn't a path, it wasn't a very amenable or attractive way to go. It just never even occurred to us that we would continue on in college. And so it was--no, I did not continue that in college. It doesn't mean I didn't continue to appreciate sports and athletics. I do. And I did. But on a personal note, no, I did not. And that this was back in the days before Title IX, okay, there was no gender equity. There really wasn't. And so, the young women of today really have to appreciate the shoulders upon which they stand, because it took a lot of effort on the part of a lot of people to get women's athletics where it is today. And is it today perfect? No, not at all. But still a long way from decades ago.

JK: Yes, progress. Certainly. I think that's a good segue into talking about your college experience. So, you can talk about deciding where to go and then what your experience was like as a college student?

[13:25]

DH: All right. Well, I went to the University of Alabama. My mother gave me two options. I could go to Auburn, or I could go to the University of Alabama, as those were both in-state schools with the lowest tuition and that's all she could afford. So those were my options. And I selected the University of Alabama. This was again in the late 60s, early 70s. It was a very, to me, and what do I know because I had never been before, but it was a very exciting time to be on a college campus. There was a great deal of activism obviously, and yes, the University of Alabama was a hotbed of social activism, actually. And it really opened my eyes, college opened my eyes, to so

many things, to different ways of thinking, to different points of view, to new ideas and, you know, what was important and what wasn't, on virtually every level. So, I really enjoyed it. I appreciated it. I got very involved in different organizations and activities on campus. I tell students, I changed my major about at least three times in the first two years. I had no clue what I wanted to do. But in fact, I wound up in American Studies because it was a great major if you didn't know what you wanted to do. And it enabled you to take courses in virtually any department, any discipline, as long as that course was dealing with America. So, for example, American History, American English, American Sociology, Religion, Art, Film, everything was game. And I really enjoyed that. And then we had four seminars that we all got together and pulled everything that we were thinking and experiencing from these different areas. But I really enjoyed it. It was a great major for me. It was a wonderful fit. And it was very flexible. During that time, women's rights were really coming into the forefront with respect to a little bit later, ERA, kind of--the Equal Rights Amendment. But really, this was the beginning, and--not the beginning, but it was a peak period for feminists thinking, and women's rights and, not just about choice, but about literally career opportunities or being able to do something. I was active as a student, but in student government during that time, the women had to have--we had our own separate organization, it was called AWS, Associated Women Students. So, I was very active in that at the college, and as well at the national level, and we couldn't belong or be an officer in the student government; that was the Student Government Association. That's a true story. And it's like, "Wow, that's, yeah." Think about it. That eventually changed, obviously, but that was a very interesting time. I always say to people at that point, if you didn't activate your voice, you didn't have a voice. And so, it was--I learned to activate my voice. And do--and understand that you have to be also at a table. You have to be at, I don't know what the table is, but you have to be at some table in order to even have a voice. So, it was a great experience. I finished in three and a half years, I was always working full time, or part time, pardon me, you know, 20 hours a week while I was in school, taking full loads. But I just loved it. And it was a great experience.

JK: What sparked your interest in social work?

DH: Well, I kind of fell into social work through the back door, if you will. My original intention was to go into the film industry, because I spent my senior year taking a lot of courses in film and media and television production and so forth. And I actually got a job that was arranged for after I graduated, in New Orleans, as a production assistant for a documentary film company. And the reason I was interested in New Orleans was because there was a young man there that I was dating at the time. But I also had a plan B. And the plan B was my advisor in American Studies kept talking to me about social work. And at that time, this was during the war on poverty. It was still big, and they were putting millions and millions and millions of dollars into the war on poverty. And that meant they actually funded social work education. So, there were scholarships and stipends. And my advisor said “this is a great opportunity if you, you know, for you. I know you enjoy working with people and you know, you ought to think about it.” So, I thought about

it. I applied. I was accepted. And ultimately, I attended because the guy in New Orleans, I decided, was not my cup of tea. So, I literally fell into the back door. I didn't know much about social work or what it did, or what they did, or anything but once I got there I fell in love. I fell in love with the values, with the mission, with what social workers do to help people. A master's in social work degree is one of the most marketable, you can do almost anything. You can do administration, you can do policy, you can be a community organizer, you can help children in child welfare, and be a therapist. I mean, just the range is enormous. And so that had a lot of appeal to me. And so that's why I ended up in social work and I never left, really.

[20:22]

JK: It shows the power of mentorship.

DH: Yes, absolutely.

JK: Will you talk a little bit more about your experience in the MSW program?

DH: Yes. You know the MSW programs are two years in length, traditionally, and they alternate semesters, once the fall semester, you do coursework, the spring, you do an internship. And then the next year, the fall semester, you do coursework and then have another internship so you have two semesters, two full semesters of full-time internship. I did my first internship at Bryce State Hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, which is actually, for those who might know something about the field of mental health is quite famous, because it was the site of the nationally known, and probably internationally known, court case called Wyatt versus Stickney. And that had to do with the rights of mental health patients, mental hospital patients, to guess what? Receive treatment. Because they all didn't receive treatment, when they were stowed away in these mental hospitals. So, when I went to the first internship, it was pre-Wyatt versus Stickney and it was a very, very interesting experience to learn about how people were treated and what they were being treated with and why and so forth. Once I got my MSW for about four months, I went back to Bryce state hospital as an MSW person. This was now post Wyatt versus Stickney. And it was like day and night, just the difference. And so, I was very fortunate to be able to experience both of those opportunities.

DH: The other thing that I had in my MSW program, the second internship in 1973 was at Tuskegee Veterans Hospital, in Tuskegee, Alabama, which is the infamous site of the Tuskegee experiments. But at that time, Tuskegee was well integrated. And they were--they had a contingent, growing contingent, of Vietnam veterans who were coming back from the war. And they didn't really know how to treat them. Psychologically speaking, they knew how to do physical treatment and take care of that. But when it came to post traumatic stress disorder, they--it wasn't even talked about. They knew something wasn't right, but hadn't really been clearly

identified and dealt with. So, what did they do? They turn to the youngest person around--a social work intern--and said, Here, why don't you do this group over here with these Vietnam vets and see what you can do. And so there we go. And I learned a lot. I learned a lot about listening. I learned a lot about the horrors of war, and returning, and so on. But anyway, I was very fortunate to have all of those experiences as an MSW student. In my second year, I started working as a research assistant for a faculty member. And that's when I got really, really keenly interested in research. And to be a researcher with credentials in social work, you need to get your PhD, so I got encouraged and was excited to continue on, and to get my PhD degree, which I did at Washington University in St. Louis. So, it was wonderful.

JK: Which is a great segue to my next question was asking you to talk about your experiences in a PhD program.

[24:35]

DH: You know, once I decided to go--well, first of all, moving from Alabama to, believe it or not, Missouri is like going to a different country. At that time, the world was much less homogenized as it is now, and so I loved going to St. Louis, I loved Washington University and learning about, you know what life was like in a different place that wasn't in the deep south. But I was very excited. They had one of the, they're one of the top social work programs in the country. And so, I was fortunate to be to be able to interact with incredible faculty, and they had tremendous resources at the time, they were the first School of Social Work that had their own library, you'll appreciate that. Yeah, and, and so it was, it was great, but I was always working and going to school. I started getting interested in behavioral interventions. And that's really where I started focusing, learning and doing research and so on. I eventually narrowed that focus to marital discord, marital dysfunction, and correspondingly, sexual dysfunction as that may arise and in marital discord. So, St. Louis is the home to Masters and Johnson, if you remember, in the Masters and Johnson clinic, and the founders were still alive and, and well, and running everything, and so I was able to leverage some of that opportunity too.

JK: Can you talk a little bit about whether or not gender had an impact on your experience as a graduate student?

DH: Gender always had an influence to me, always has and probably always will. And not so much in a good way, necessarily, I will say, I think, I think things are a little different now that women do have more opportunities and are no longer bypassed as quickly as we were, for decades. And when I was in school, of course, this is prior to any recognition of things like sexual harassment, or hostile work environment or, you know, micro aggressions, and so on and so forth. And, so we just sort of experienced some of these things and figured out ways around them, so that it wouldn't prohibit our progress from being made. So, I say that because, you know, nowadays

when the #MeToo movement came on I went to one of the rallies on campus actually right after that, and somebody handed me the mic, and I said, "me too", you know, I've been the victim of sexual harassment. And the next thing I know, the student newspaper had said I had been raped. And I had never said that, just to clarify the record here. But I was the victim of sexual harassment in the workplace. And as many of the women were, who I worked with, and we talked about it amongst ourselves, but we felt totally helpless to do anything. So, gender is always an issue. And like I said, not always for the positive. But hopefully, if we still continue to be vigilant, we make progress.

JK: Yes, yes. And while you were in graduate school, did you plan on going into higher education or looking for a tenure track position? Or were you also considering other career paths?

DH: Well, once again, while I was in the PhD program, I was working 20 hours a week in the field of social work, actually, and at the Missouri Institute of Psychiatry, and I was looking forward to just having one job, you know, not having to be a full-time student and working. In social work, once you get your PhD, you're, you're really sort of guided toward an academic career. Because you can practice social work with an MSW easy, that's not a problem. But to be a faculty member, you really have to have the PhD and to do the research. Typically, you're going to have a PhD. So that was really the path I was guided on. And yes, I was looking for a tenure track position and several came open, several offers were made, and I selected Florida State.

JK: So, the wonderful segue into my next question, which is about your early experiences at Florida State.

[30:02]

DH: You know, my early career at Florida State was really good and yet the initial environment was challenging. Let me explain real quick--when I went to the first faculty meeting at Florida State in the School of Social Work, unbeknownst to me, the faculty had been in a major war. And actually, it was over gender. There was a female dean. She was one of the few in the country and they were having lawsuits and, you know, counter lawsuits and they didn't tell any of us and as a new young assistant professor, I didn't even know to ask, Do you have any lawsuits? You know, who would ask that? So anyway, the first faculty meeting, they almost got in a biff out, like, literally. And I went, Oh, my goodness, what have I gotten into here? But that actually subsided after a couple of years, and I just went about my business doing what tenure track faculty do. We teach, we do research, we do service, we teach some more, we research some more, we do some more service, you know, the--what do you call it? --the rat race, kind of a treadmill, I guess. We get on and you kind of don't get off until you reach certain milestones. But I really enjoyed what I was doing. I enjoyed teaching, I enjoyed research, obviously, a lot. And I actually enjoyed the service that I did. I started getting involved with different community organizations. My area was

in behavioral interventions and human sexuality. And so, I was able to get involved with teen pregnancy prevention programs, and sex education, advocate for sex education in Leon County, which was not a slam dunk at all. So, there were in the LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning] community, you know, and I remember a group of students coming to me because they knew what I taught and that I was sensitive to their issues. And they couldn't find a faculty advisor, which they needed to become a bona fide club and organization on campus. So, I agreed to be their advisor. And so, it was that kind of thing. And through the decades, it really was decades, I just did the traditional route, and activities that a faculty member does. It wasn't until I got tenure that I had children. And I have tremendous respect, complete adoration for women who have children prior to tenure. Because it's, well, you know, how do you do that? I'm impressed. And for single mothers, oh, my goodness, I can't even--I have so much empathy for them, it's insane. But for good reason. Because I know what I had and I had a supportive partner who was also a academic. And we both knew we had to really fully support one another, to get everybody's career moving and moving in the right direction. But without that it would have been very, very difficult. But I enjoyed my early career, but I worked incredibly hard. As all faculty do. I appreciate the efforts.

JK: Can you talk about moving into administration at Florida State? What sparked your interest in that? And what were your experiences like?

[34:14]

DH: Sure. The way I like to tell this story is, the dean that we ended up with after the woman retired, a new person was hired. And as the years wore on, this person was not the most popular among the faculty. That's the most polite way I can say it. And, he lasted a good 12 years. And during that time a number of really good colleagues and great faculty that we had just decided to leave. I mean they said, “I've had enough of this and it doesn't seem like anything is going to change. He's not going anywhere. Nobody seems to listen to our pleas that this is not working.” And, so people left. So, I was pretty demoralized by that. But remember, I was determined I wasn't going to move for my kids. So, I was place-bound in that way. And, so what I started doing as a way to adjust or adapt to that environment was I started reaching out to colleagues in other departments and doing a lot more interdisciplinary work. So, I worked with faculty in psychology, I worked with faculty in biology, and in sociology, and then, and other areas, which was actually a godsend, because it helped form some really productive research teams, that together, we were able to get pretty impressive amounts of funding from NIH [National Institutes of Health]. And so, you know, the opportunities, sometimes, you don't see them, but they come, and you just have to take advantage. So anyway, eventually, this dean stepped aside. And I always thought I could do that job. All I have to do is the opposite of whatever this guy did. You know, and that's what I did. And I applied and I got it. And really, it was scary at first, because I had--I was victim of that imposter syndrome to begin with, that, Can I really do this? And, and I can, I

mean, there's so much that we can do you just have to do it. And so, I enjoyed it a lot. And I had a good run for six years. And eventually I was asked by our provost to come and work in central administration in the Office of the Provost, and so I did that. And then I, what did I do? I was dean of graduate studies, which is one of my favorite jobs and if you were to ask me why was that a favorite time, it was just learning about all of the graduate programs. We had over 100 PhD programs and, you know, a couple of hundred more master's degree programs and learning all about the various disciplines and what their requirements were and what their specialties were, and so forth. And then helping students get those graduate degrees was really fulfilling It was a rewarding time. And then eventually, I became a vice president for Academic Quality and External Programs. So, also, during that time, I was the Title IX coordinator for the university, and I handled all of the accreditation--their regional accreditor was SACS [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools]. And so, I did that. So, I did a lot. I had all the international programs under my umbrella, as well as what we call Extended Learning. And they were--FSU [Florida State University] was early into the online learning, believe it or not, when I was dean of social work, and that was several years prior, we started the first online MSW program in the country and got it accredited, which nobody thought you could teach social work online. It was like, No way. And of course, there's a way. And so, we did.

JK: I want to step back to a little bit earlier in your career and have you talk a bit more about the research that you were doing.

[38:56]

DH: Oh, my research, ultimately, by the early 1980s, began focusing on HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] prevention. HIV was, of course, spreading rapidly. And still, during that time, when we first started moving into this space, the thinking that was predominant was that it was primarily a gay men's disease. And if people go, Oh, yeah, but how ridiculous? But in fact, it really set back the prevention work, because if you only think this is a gay male disease, whatever, so there was very little research or knowledge about women. And so, we focused on women and their partners in HIV prevention. Like, How can we get women safe, safer? So that was the focus, We did our work in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, which at that time were social laboratories, literal hotbeds of HIV transmission, and particularly among women. And we were looking at women who were in relationships, women who were trading sex for drugs, there was South Beach, you know--very popular among the young people and you know, kind of a glitzy place to go. But at that time, it was really a hotbed for drugs, and prostitution and unhealthy ways of interacting. And so we prioritized women of color as well, because there was nothing, there was very little in the literature on Black or Latina women. At one point during our research, we felt the need to add Haitian women to our, our protocols, and we developed all of our interventions were in English and in Spanish, and we made a proposal and had it done to have a third in Creole, for our Haitian to be subjects. And at that time, I don't remember if you recall, there was a lot of controversy

about research being done under the auspices of federally funded research. And so, there was this, I thought, horrible award, they called it a Golden Fleece Award for a researcher who would be called out for having been given money to study, you know, the reproduction of fruit flies or something. And a congressman thought that was insane, so they got a Golden Fleece Award for it even though that was really important work. And nobody needed to explain that. But somebody obviously didn't explain it well, but nonetheless, we were refused funding for the Haitian addition to our projects, because there was too much politics around, if you remember, the Haitians who were coming over on boats and, and eventually were denied entry. And I mean, it was just a horrid time in South Florida. And, once again, immigration in the country. If you were Cuban, it was okay. But if you were Haitian, it was not okay. And so anyway, I won't forget that. That was a really unfortunate thing. But I learned, you know, you learn.

JK: Such important work at such a really critical moment in that epidemic, too. Because, in part, because this is of interest to me, but I also know of interest to you, can you talk about how gender impacted your experiences and your career as an administrator, particularly at Florida State? So, prior to coming to California?

DH: Yeah. You know, I always thought that because I was a woman, and a social worker, because I had two strikes against me in a way--one being female and number two, being a social worker. Because in the higher ed [education] community, there's a pecking order. There's a hierarchy of disciplines if you haven't noticed, and often, you know, of course, the STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] disciplines, those are the smartest, the best, the brightest, and everybody else is sort of somewhere around maybe, and social work is not in that top tier. And so, I always had to, like, double up on making sure my credibility was compatible, if that makes sense. So, I knew that in order to get the respect and earn the credibility, if you will, from other academicians, you know--the physicist who's just doing incredible work, and then I'm going to try and tell them about something that they should do different--I needed to have a research track record. I needed to have a similar set of credentials, because if I didn't, I would have no credibility whatsoever. And so that was another reason that it helped that I had the kind of grant and funding experience that many of the other faculty not in social work had, which helped. But I recall at one point, we had a very important research council. And I had served on that for, I don't know, several years. And the first couple of years, it would just make me crazy going to the meetings because, I mean, it was classic, you know, if I said something, it might or might not get acknowledged, and then the person, the guy next to me would say the same thing, and everybody would go, Oh, wow, that was so good. You know, [laughs] it's classic, but it happens. It really does happen. And by the time I left that committee, I was chairing it. And so that particular appointment or election, or however I got to be chair, really said to me, okay, you have established credibility, because this was a group of the top producers, the top principal investigators and scholars around campus. So, it was a reinforcing moment for me.

[46:29]

JK: Were there many other women in administration at Florida State. While you were there?

DH: Well, at that time, I think we had twelve deans, and there were three women. When I was an AVP, there was the dean of undergraduate studies was a female. A few women, yes, there were some. Was there ever a female provost or president? No.

JK: Let's talk about coming to California. What interested you in the job at Cal State Monterey Bay? And what was your experience like there?

DH: You know, well first of all, the position was of interest. But it was really about the mission and the value statement at Monterey Bay, and also within the CSU [California State University]. If you read the value statement at Monterey Bay, it reads like a social work code of ethics, practically. I mean, it's very compatible with my belief system and my value system, and the mission of what the Cal State system was doing and trying to do with respect to accessibility to education, and really providing educational opportunities for more individuals in different areas, in that case, in three different catchment counties, and in North Central California. And of course, the location. I don't know, if you've been to Monterey, it's quite beautiful. Yes. But I will tell you that my experience there was great. I still have lifelong friends that I made at Monterey Bay, which I will continue to have. And it was challenging. It was incredibly challenging because the university was only 11 years old when I started. There were lots of disagreements going on that had gone on between the president and the faculty. And the president ended up with a couple of different votes of no confidence, I believe. So, by the time I got there, building relationships and trust was important. Right? And so that's kind of what I tried to do. And we focused on enrollment. We focused on —student experiences. I mean basics. It was basic, like, what you named your majors and advising systems. I was fortunate the Panetta Institute is on the campus of Monterey Bay. So, I got to know Leon and Sylvia Panetta and all of the great work that they do. So, all of that was just really fulfilling. It was interesting. It was great. It was challenging because the recession hit, I think I started in '06, and by '07 things were starting to go underwater, budget-wise, and then it got worse. Well, as a new campus, we really needed new buildings. And not only did we need new buildings, we needed to take down old buildings, which costs a lot of money. And nobody seemed to have any money for that. So that part was frustrating. It's built on the former Fort Ord, which is an old army base. So we did what we could to make it welcoming. And we did, I mean it's a great campus with incredible students, faculty and staff

[51:08]

JK: Any things that you're particularly proud of, from your tenure at Monterey Bay?

DH: Well first off, the research enterprise there is quite strong. And I think I helped support that a lot. I think we did get some turned around with the giving, with the philanthropy. We made major turnarounds with trying to get the curriculum, we did a whole revamp of general education and made it so that you didn't need a law degree to understand what the requirements were. And that was really an important student centric kind of thing to do, and that nobody wants to do. And often it takes years on one campus to make a major revision in general education. And we were able to do it within a very reasonable, like a year, kind of timeframe, which was very good. Yeah, it's amazing. And we opened the library, the first library there, that was a huge, wonderful, wonderful day. And it's a wonderful building. And I think we increased, we did increase the student population. We kind of turned around, they were going thisaway down when they should have been going thisaway up. And we did turn that ship around, which was good. And oh, and managed to get the institution as a full-fledged Division II member of the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association]. When I got there, they were on, like double probation or something, which I didn't even know existed, and they weren't even a member. So, in order to be a member, you have to meet certain criteria and do some requirements, right? And they hadn't done them. And so anyway, we did that too.

JK: I mean, in some ways, really, I mean, this is like building a university from the ground up, right, given that it was new, and that there were a lot of projects that you had to tackle that were, I think, very early in the history of an institution.

DH: Even such a small thing as street signs, and building names, there weren't those and people were constantly getting lost because everything looked alike because there were barracks and buildings that looked alike. I mean, literally. And everything was numbered. But it wasn't in a coherent way. Like, Building #2 could be next to #23. It didn't make any sense. Yeah, confusing.

JK: And that, like you mentioned, that can feel like a small thing, but especially for first generation students where walking onto a college campus is a huge deal, but can also be so intimidating. So being able to find your way around is actually really important.

DH: Yes, and actually, I got lost multiple times (laughter). This is no wonder everybody says, “Where am I?” you know.

JK: So, what interested you in making the transition from Monterey Bay to Northridge?

[54:46]

DH: Well, I had been hearing about Northridge of course for six years being in the system. I heard a lot from Jolene Koester, my predecessor, who you know was very proud of Northridge and what had been accomplished so when she decided to retire, I thought you know, I wouldn't mind being

back on a larger established campus where everything is already in place. Not everything, but you know what I mean. I don't have to tear down buildings, so much. So that was really what I was coming back to-- a large established campus.

JK: And what struck you first when you started at Northridge?

DH: You know, I think lots of things. First off, the passion and the loyalty of employees and the alums. The number of employees who have been at CSUN for decades is staggering. And the multi-generational number of employees I mean we have parents and children working as employees who've been there or people who went to school here, who now work here. There's a tremendous amount of loyalty among the employees, which I think is incredible, and that is true, too, for the alumni. But I think, I think the other message that struck me was--and this came through very loud and clear during the search process that, Yeah, you know, "We're doing fine". We're a great university. But in fact, we are a well-kept secret. Nobody knows about all these wonderful things that are happening at [Cal State] Northridge. [Inaudible]. So that, that was something. That really struck me. And so that really led to one of the priorities of building the reputation and spreading the word about [Cal State] Northridge. I also found that I think we had kind of reached a plateau on student success. All the low hanging fruit had been picked, about what needed to be done. You know, the campus had done a marvelous job of graduating super seniors, for example, students who had so many credits, and yet no degree, and they could have graduated, so they did. And once that happened, then it's like now we got to do some harder work. Now we have to do more work and harder work. And I think the other thing that I garnered pretty early on, obviously, is that the faculty and the campus was really tied to the mission of accessibility, and opening our doors to as many students as we possibly could. And we did. And we got way over enrolled. And, but equally important, we were serving a lot of students, but we weren't graduating enough students. And that was another issue that I think came to the--came to my attention early on.

[00:58:36]

JK: I know that's something you worked a lot on and focused much of your energy on, can you talk more about those projects, that some of the programs that you implemented, to promote graduation and get graduation rates up?

DH: You know, as part of GI [graduation initiative] 2025, even before that, we had all been very committed to student success, and we have to be as equally attentive to accessibility, but also completion. It's not enough to bring students in, if they leave, they don't have a degree, maybe they have some debt. It's not serving students well. And so, getting that turned around meant implementing a lot of new programs, implementing a lot of things that had either hadn't been done before, or maybe faculty, some faculty thought that was somebody else's role, or, you

know, whatever. Change is never easy. But we, we implemented all kinds of things--Matadors Rising, and encouraging students to take 15 credit units as freshmen, encouraging students to see advising to use the vast array of support services that we have. At every student orientation that I attended, and I attended, literally, hundreds, probably through the years. I would tell students, "Pay attention to your classes. Go to class. Get to know your faculty advisor. Get to know your faculty and the staff in your departments." But also, "Get involved. Get involved with a club or an organization or an affiliate group that, you know--and if we don't have one that you're interested in, well, start one up. And we'll support you." There were so many different strategies that we have tried and that we will continue to do. But it was all about being student-centric. What does it take for a student to enter Northridge, either as a freshman or as a transfer student, and to have a successful academic career, and to graduate, A to Z. What does that take? Well, that means we have to look at all of our practices and processes from financial aid to counseling, to advising, to everything; how we teach, you know, sometimes faculty will be using the same set of notes for 10 years. And they do the same thing. And I think, "Not anymore." Nowadays, everything has changed, but who knew? Right? So, I think that the challenge of moving to a truly authentic student-centric mindset is not one that the academy or any university does easily. And it takes massive buy in. And it takes massive participation from everybody, from literally the groundskeepers, to the custodians, to the receptionist, to the financial aid counselors, the faculty, the president, the provost, everybody. Everybody has to be on the same page with it. And that's always a work in progress, I think.

JK: What are some of the other challenges that you and the university faced when you arrived at Northridge? I know for example, the campus was facing really pretty significant state funding cuts, other financial challenges. So maybe if you could talk about that, and then any other--

[01:02:56]

DH: Yeah.

JK: --other challenges that you saw as you arrived on campus and began your work at Northridge.

DH: Funding challenges are almost a truism in higher education. I think in my, in my 14 years or 14 and a half years as a president, there might have been two years where I went, "Oh, wow, we have extra money, we can do some initiatives, we could do something different," you know. But for that reason, I came to understand and appreciate there are fluctuations in state funding. Some years are better. Some years are worse. You deal with it. But you also need to think about ways that--where you can augment your revenue, augment your funds, that make you not so totally dependent on what the state of California does. And so hence, the emphasis on philanthropy, on external funding, be it research that supports students, or more film rights, you know, much more filming on campus, or leasing out a parking lot that we never use to a car company. Okay.

Because we're getting valuable money that we can pour back into our system. Well, so other challenges, let's see, putting a senior leadership team together. When I first came, that's always--I shouldn't say always--it's typically not unusual for a new president to want some of their own, his or her own. But at the same time, you have to assess how each person--I mean, just because I didn't hire somebody doesn't mean they're not the best. And so, you take some time to assess. And once I did that, I realized I needed to make some changes. And so those are always challenging. But I learned that it's better to make the difficult decision and move on and move forward as opposed to living with not making a decision. I also think that--and I sort of mentioned this earlier, but I will tell you, a challenge really was moving that student success needle, more, more. There's no letup. It's relentless. We can't let up. And it gets tiring, after a while. For some people they're like, Ugh, now what? You know? But in point of fact, it's always a, Now what? We *have* to be, Now what? What else do we need to do? Because there are so many things that we don't get, or, or it takes some time to figure out that we've set up this administrative barrier, and you know, we can knock it down. But often somebody's got to draw our attention to it.

DH: I also think that one of the other issues was in faculty diversity. That's a challenge. Because for a campus that is so extraordinarily diverse in its student population, we have a long way to go in faculty. And that was clear to me early on. And I've tried to bring attention to that, and multiple venues and in multiple ways. But that continues, quite frankly, to be a challenge.

JK: I want to come back to that in a moment. But I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the graduation initiative strategies and any that you found to be particularly effective at Northridge and that--

DH: You know, I do think--

JK: Oh, go ahead.

[01:07:17]

DH: Yeah, no, I do think that I was very excited by the push on students taking 15 units. And contrary to what some people believe that that's too much, that's asking too much of our students, can't do that. Our students *can* do that. And they have done that and they will continue to do that. Not all students, but more students. You know, we were in a position where sometimes students were being advised by multiple people--Oh, don't, you know, No, no, no, no, no, don't do that. Take fewer. Take fewer [units]. So, I think that, that was really exciting to get that off the ground. I frankly, really enjoyed--I became a fan of chatbots early on. And so, our Ask Matty and the other chat bots that are being used, and now they're being written about all over. I love that. I do think the advising hub is a huge, huge move forward. For students on the campus, we're probably one

of the last campuses that has an advising hub for freshmen or all students for that matter. So, I think that there are some really important things that need to be done. What I haven't addressed are equity gaps, we've made some progress there, but not enough. And that really has to be, you know, you have to drill down so deeply in terms of actual classes and departments. And who's teaching? And how are they teaching? And is it okay, that 40% of your students fail? Is it okay, that, of that 40%, 70% are students of color? No, no, that's not okay. And that's a continuing challenge that has to be addressed.

JK: Absolutely. So, I know this might be difficult, but I was wondering of you could talk a bit about the debates around the various executive orders, and, you know, "eleven hundred", "eleven ten", and tensions with faculty and the Faculty Senate that accompany those debates.

DH: You know, I think that the debate centered on lots of misinformation and miscommunication, quite frankly. And I think you have to put this all in context. First off that, you know, part of the CSU Graduation Initiative was to recognize that the path to degrees for any student within the system needed to be clear. And it needed to be consistent, according to the chancellor's office, and whoever else was in the decision-making mode at that time. But the intent was to streamline the experience and allow those students who really wanted a direct route to their degree. Okay, here's the plan. And here, it's clear. And if you're at this school, you're going to have the same requirements as if you were at another CSU and so forth. And so, as these executive orders were originally drafted, they were focused on GE [general education] areas A through E, right? —The plan was similar to what we had done--what we were already doing at Northridge except we had an area F, and that was our cultural competency. Some of the other campuses had those courses embedded in A through E, but we had area F. And we can debate whether F was ever officially approved. Some people say it was. Some people say it wasn't. I don't know, and at this point, I don't really care, had it been officially approved, but it doesn't matter. We had it. And so, when it became clear that the executive order was somehow going to exclude our area F, that's when, that's when tensions started to rise. So, there was--I did advocacy. Obviously, our students and faculty did advocacy. Because what I was trying to say to the chancellor's office was that their plan had the unintended consequence of not letting Northridge highlight what we were very proud as a legacy on this campus to highlight. And it made it seem as if somehow our area F wasn't important. And, and of course, CSUN is a champion. We all have been, I think, champions for diversity in ethnic studies programs. We take very seriously our role to promote and advocate for social justice and racial justice. But ultimately, we were able to retain area F. But somehow, the misinformation continued to circulate. And once you get students convinced that we were--we--we're trying to eliminate the ethnic studies, departments or requirements, which that was never, ever, ever, ever mentioned or in the cards. It just was not part of the plan. And so, in point of fact, it was quite the opposite. We were trying to get the ethnic studies into the plan in a CO approved way, (Chancellor's Office approved way). So, I think that, you know, it was definitely challenging. I chalk a lot of the tensions up to misinformation. And I will leave

it at that. And once you get academic politics involved, then it gets really very complicated. And I think that was unfortunate when people start making these academic disagreements or academic miscommunications or however you want to couch it, and you try to make that a personal issue. It's, it's really unfortunate. I also think that some of our faculty did not appreciate the fact that we are a part of a system. And at the end of the day, Northridge is not an autonomous university that gets to do what it wants to do when it wants to do it. And people might not like that, but then they don't need to be working for a system. I personally find that there is always tension between the autonomy of a campus and the system office. That is just part of how it naturally evolves and develops. Sometimes it works in our favor. And sometimes it doesn't. But we're still part of the system. And so at a certain point, when the Faculty Senate said, well, we're just not going to play, we're not going to do this. That's when I had to, unfortunately, do an administrative implementation. And once the dust settled down, and people realized, "Well, there's not any difference, we're still, you know, so here we are."

[01:16:09]

JK: Indeed.

DH: I will say to this day, I don't like the term "executive order". [Laughs]

JK: Like that. On a less difficult topic: Let's talk about some of your biggest--what you would identify as your biggest successes and achievements during your tenure at CSUN.

DH: Okay, in my head, I go through the University priorities, at least the ones that were there when I was still active as president. And so I can count things in those different buckets. So the first priority, of course, is student success. And I do think that we made a great deal of progress in moving the needle on student success, graduation, retention. My disappointment is that the needle didn't move as much as it needs to move on equity gaps, but that's a work in progress. It still needs to be made. I think bringing in the concepts and opportunities around innovation and entrepreneurship that students have on campus now was a huge, good thing to do. And I really appreciate it and was proud of that all of the, the competitions, you know, the Bull Ring and the App [application] Jam and the AI [artificial intelligence] core--everything that has to do with innovation. And what really made me happy was to know I think during the last year, that the students who were participating in like Bull Ring, and some of these App Jam competitions were from all over campus. Some of these things started out just in business or engineering. And then gradually, they've just grown. And so, several hundred students participate and from all over, and that's fabulous, because you need creativity, and you need innovation, no matter if you're going to work in math, or you're going to work in art. So, I think having that kind of inspiration and opportunity is a really good thing for our students. I do think that on the employee side, the employee's success we instituted for all of our MPP, our management and professional

personnel, administrators around campus, a set of leadership principles, which I thought was a huge move forward to really document and identify what are our values as leaders, what do we expect our managers and our supervisors to be, to be as, as managers and supervisors. And also, in their interactions with, not only with each other, but with their employees. And things around integrity and valuing diversity and, you know, identifying talent early, and things that are really important for managers and supervisors. And I felt really good about that. We started a program called CSUN's Shine from Within, so that employees across campus, not faculty so much, but other employees that work in the departments or work in the colleges or in the divisions could have an opportunity for a leadership development program. And it's like, a one-year program, and they do a project for the campus. And it's a great opportunity for employees who want to learn more about the University as a whole. And also, who might have further aspirations. Maybe they want to get a promotion, maybe they want to be in a management position at some point. So that's been a really good program that I hope continues. And quite frankly, on the employee side, I think that, you know, the first year I was here around the winter holidays, I said, Well, what do you all do for the winter holidays for campus? And they said, Well, we don't do anything. We're too big. And I said, Well, that's not true. And so we started a winter celebration. And I always had so much fun going and attending and being able to talk with people and then we added the summer celebration. And I just think being able to have some informal fun times with employees, faculty, and staff is a good thing.

DH: I think also on the achievement side, being able to open up the Pride Center and the Dream Center and the Sustainability Center and setting up scholarships for undocumented students. We've never done that. Nobody had done that. On the visibility and reputation front, well, the first thing that occurred that made me think, "Ah, it's working, we're finally getting some attention" was when the LAEDC, the Economic Development Corporation notified me that we were going to get that Eddy award this is a big deal from LAEDC. And we were only the fourth institution of higher education in Los Angeles to get it and the first ones were like USC, UCLA, and Caltech, [laughs] and then Northridge. and so that was a really nice recognition for us.

DH: I think that when I walked through the LAX airport one day in terminal five and I saw this giant billboard, for "Northridge On the Rise" and saw one our alums up there, that was a nice thing, and people recognize that.

[01:22:49]

DH: One of the things that I did was working with what we came to call the CSU 5, which is a kind of a collaboration with all of the other CSU campuses in Los Angeles County. There are five of us. And what happened was, when I would go to meetings, whether it was a Chamber of Commerce meeting, or it didn't matter, you know, a mayor's candidate forum, and anytime the conversation turned to higher education, what I heard was UCLA, USC, [pauses] maybe Caltech, occasionally

Pepperdine. Nothing about the CSUs. Nothing. And it really started rubbing me the wrong way, quite frankly. And, and so I spoke to my colleague presidents at the other four campuses, and I said, you know, if we were to approach some of these funding agencies as a cohort, as a collaborative, we represent 140,000 students and, or something like that, in Los Angeles. We have 40,000 faculty in Los Angeles, we would have a stronger voice, I believe, as a collective than individually. So anyway, we started doing that and it was nice, and it helped. It actually has helped, even I believe, individual campuses, because of the CSU 5, some people know more about Northridge than they would have or they know more about CSULA, or Dominguez Hills, or whatever. And so, I think that was a success.

DH: Another achievement that I have to give most credit to Senator Bob Hertzberg, was the passing of Measure M, the transportation bill, the transportation initiative. And until Bob and I teamed up and really put our noses to the grindstone CSUN was not included in any of that. We were a transportation desert. And you know, most everybody knows our students who were having to use public transportation were--it was taking them two hours to come to campus and, or plus. And then, you know, certain bus routes would stop after a certain hour at night, even though their classes went longer. And it was just awful, and yet this huge, huge multibillion-dollar transportation initiative. And none of the plans were we--was Cal State Northridge campus included. So, before that passed, we went to work and worked really hard, really hard to influence those policy makers and decision makers, who were writing all of this down and what would be included in the plan. And that went from everybody from Mayor Garcetti to all the county supervisors in the city and so forth. And anyway, we were successful. They finally included us in the plan and then Measure M passed. So, at some point when these projects start, Northridge is going to be the recipient of much better mass transit, for our employees, and mostly for our students. And I'm so happy about that. I hope that I'm around to see the fruits of that when it comes to pass. I doubt it, but I can always hope.

DH: I think the Innovation and Economic Prosperity--it's called IEP--the IEP designation that we received from the American Association of Public and Land Grant Universities. That was a big deal. A lot of people might not know that, but it really was a big deal. And the fact that we were among the early group, quite frankly, to receive that designation, was incredible. And there's so many people to be thankful for their efforts and helping to make that happen. But you know, none of these things happen in a vacuum. I call them achievements. They're not my achievements. They are the University's achievements that happened under my watch. Truly. But I do think we've increased our grant funding and recognition of principal investigators and the important role that they have, I think that support for research and external funding, I think that was a huge milestone. I think what we were able to accomplish in philanthropy has been fantastic. Thank you for the Nazarians and the Booksteins, and the Valeras and all of those to come, I hope, will give in the future!

[01:28:24]

JK: Can you talk a little bit more about that? I know that fundraising is not an easy thing, it's a challenging, challenging task. And so, talk more about your work in that area.

DH: Well, it's really, I would say, about a couple of different things. Number one, it's about relationships. It's about relationships that you develop with these individuals, so that they have confidence that they're about, you know, a huge chunk of money that they're going to part with is going to be used and guided in the way that they want. And so that's about relationships. And the other part, though, is that it's also about having a team of advancement work that really are out there beating the streets and bringing people to our steps. And, you know, my job gets easier if, if somebody brings me, somebody who is already interested, and then I can help them get over that nervousness, maybe a little bit about it. But so, it's a team effort, no question. People don't meet you one day, and then write a check for $10 million. That isn't how it works. It often takes several years of cultivation, and working on the relationships. But they also have to be authentic. You can't just do this like you're selling used cars. You know, you have to be so passionate about what it is that you are selling--and we are selling. We're selling the University. We're selling the notion that our students can make a difference in California, and in Los Angeles, and in the world. And that's what we're selling. And so, you have to believe that, and you have to be very passionate about it, and be able to demonstrate what you do and how you do it. And that, you know, often our students are our best spokespeople, our best ambassadors for our donors. So, I won't say it's easy, but it's definitely fulfilling when it works.

JK: Imagine [laughs]. We touched on this earlier, but I was hoping you would talk more about it that you really prioritized diversity and inclusion during your tenure at CSUN. So, can you talk more about your initiatives and projects in that area and their impact on the campus?

[01:31:11]

DH: Well, I will start with constantly referring to the need to diversify the faculty. And I've been talking about that for years, literally. And unfortunately, I don't hire the faculty personally, that takes place in the departments and in the colleges. So, trying to raise awareness of why this is so important and why we need to do it and why you can't just keep doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Trying to hold the deans accountable, more accountable for hiring. I think appointing a chief diversity officer, the first one for the university was important, but it was a risk as well because sometimes when you do that people then think, "Oh, well diversity, equity and inclusion. That's Natalie's problem. That's not my problem." [inaudible] "Let's let Natalie do that work, I'll do something else." And that's not how it should be at all. So that was the risk. But I do think that following up with the appointment of a commission on diversity and inclusion that is broadly represented, representative across campus was a good

achievement. A good thing to do. And I think--and that was done of course, before last summer, when all of the horrific racial injustice came to all of our front radars, and was just horrible, and people on campus wanting to know what we were going to do, and being able to have a commission that already existed and Chief Diversity Officer, and so that was good. I think setting aside funds that we didn't even know we were going to have, where they were going to come from, but they were going to come from somewhere, for sure. But setting aside some funds for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion grant program. And, again, I'm sorry, I won't be around to see the fruition from those efforts, because I read through all of the proposals, and I was very impressed with what people were proposing and what they were going to--trying to do. But I really find that you know, as much as Northridge prides itself on being a very diverse community, and we do, that even there we have, you know, how do people define diversity? How do they define inclusion? And people define it in different ways. So, there's always work to be done, always work to be done. I challenged my cabinet before I left, I said, "You know, you need to take a look at every single practice, every single policy, everything that we do, or that you do in your division, I'm not talking about just students, every single thing, and say, 'Is this just? Or is this unjust? How is this affecting all of our community? And what do we need to do different?'" Because so often, we have we just have blinders on. I mean, we do that with, unfortunately, we know we did that with students, we think we have a really good idea. And then we go, finally go, "Well, maybe we should ask the students?" Nobody ever used to ask the students, historically speaking. It was just, "Well, here's what we're going to do now.

JK: Related, oh, go ahead.

DH: Sorry, I really want to mention sustainability and everything about climate change, because I think that was a--that is one of my pride points. And part of that is that, you know, I have been very involved with the President's Climate Commitment, and the signatories, and so on and so forth. But it was so great to come to a campus where you already had an Institute for Sustainability, but really, we never had a master plan for sustainability. And now we do, and it's just magnificent the work that these people are doing and everybody, from students to faculty to staff, are engaged and embedded in valuing everything from being a bee campus to a tree campus to having the first net zero building in the CSU, our Sustainability Center, you know, we have a sustainability center, in our AS [Associated Students]. Faculty work side by side with students and staff on all of these issues, and faculty who are out in the community working on environmental justice issues, and it's just, it's just great. It's just great. And the timing right now. It would be nice to be a president under Biden versus our prior person. That's all I can say. Sorry.

JK: So, I understand. Let's see. I think--let's talk about--let's move to your involvement with the National College Athletic Association, which you've--I mean for decades, you've been involved. And talk about your role there. And then also the role that you see--or the significance of collegiate sports.

[01:37:49]

DH: Yeah. My involvement with the NCAA started when I was at Florida State because I was appointed the faculty athletic representative or FAR. That's a designated position that is--kind of serves as a liaison between the president and the athletic department. It is supposed to be a bridge, and you have to have somebody in that role. So anyway, that was my role, plus I think I said I was the Title IX coordinator. And this was before it had to do with sexual misconduct issues. It really was focused on gender equity issues. And my daughter was also a soccer player at the University of Alabama. So, I have it from a parent's standpoint as well. But once you get involved with athletics, and I love sports, always have, always will. But once you get involved with collegiate athletics, you learn the power of athletics, for so many different purposes. One is for attracting students. And in the case of Northridge, I would say student athletes to come. And many of our student athletes, if I say, "Why did you come to Northridge?" You know, "What attracted you to Northridge?" Well, it was the sport, it was the coach, it was this, it was that, and so that it does attract students. It's like, if you have a good debate team, you're going to attract good debaters often, but it also helps with other students who really want school pride, school spirit, and--am I losing you there?

[ed. note: Internet connection issue.]

JK: We're good.

DH: Anyway, athletics is a good thing, for the most part, but it requires a lot of attention. It requires a lot of funding. We were able to secure additional funding from the NCAA for our Matador Achievement Center, which, not quite, just about a million dollars for Academic Support Services. Through the years, I served on the President's Council when I was at Monterey Bay for Division Two, and when I came to Northridge, because Michael Drake was the Big West Conference representative to the Division One board, and left and went to Ohio State, I got moved into his former position. So, all of a sudden, now I'm on the Division One board, which was great for a voice at the table, and then I was eventually on the board of governors. So, I have a lot of governance experience. I still serve on a couple of committees. One is the Committee on Academics. And the other is their Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. So, I still do that work for the NCAA. But I do think athletics can be great. When it's working well, it's just fantastic. And the opportunities for students to learn life skills that they don't necessarily learn at any other place to have the kind of social support, but also the academic support because they have to be really on top of their studies to make the right academic progress to maintain their eligibility. So, it's not an easy thing to do to be an athlete and also a good student, but a lot of our students do it. And it's so, it's so great. And finally, it gives alums often a reason to come back, and a reason to give back.

JK: And strengthens ties between students and the University in so many ways.

DH: Yes. Yes.

JK: I do feel that we've mentioned this at a couple points, but I'd like you to talk more about it because I know you were very active civic leader, particularly during your time at CSUN. So, you can talk about that work and its significance both for the university and then for the broader Los Angeles region.

[01:42:29]

DH: Well, as I was saying earlier, my involvement in various civic organizations in Los Angeles was totally, totally related to increasing the value of a CSUN degree. And you know, if my presence reminds some business leaders or some committee leaders that next time they want to go recruit for their business, they're going to remember Northridge, good. And that actually, we've seen the fruits of some of that, that alums coming back, they can help with internships that can help with hiring. There's just so many benefits of people in the greater community and not just in the Valley, although the Valley clearly is important. But in the Greater Los Angeles region, for employers recognizing the value of a CSUN degree. That helps our students who are graduating and trying to get jobs. It also helps our alums that are out there in jobs. I can't tell you how many of our alums would tell me, "You know, I didn't use to put my CSUN stuff out. I wouldn't, like, make it in my office that I was from CSUN [inaudible]." And they're like, "Now I do all the time. We're everywhere." And I said, "Yeah, we are with over 370,000 alum, my goodness, be proud." So, it really is about the value of the degree. And we got better internships, we got better business partnerships, we got sponsors for our Bull Ring, you know, all of those things make a difference. And I will say, [pauses] I wouldn't say I was totally responsible, but it doesn't hurt to have the visibility out in the community, reminding people, here we are, and we're big, and we're proud and take advantage of us. In a good way.

JK: It goes back to one of the things that struck you first about campus, right that you kept hearing that this is a hidden gem in the valley, and making sure--

DH: Yes.

JK: --people know about it. So, given the historical significance of the COVID pandemic, can you talk about agreeing to delay your retirement to help lead the university through a really difficult period? I would say probably one of the hardest years of [inaudible] everyone's lives. And then also thinking ahead, what lasting impact do you think the pandemic might have on CSUN? And then on higher education more broadly?

DH: You know, there were three of us who were set to retire in June of 2020. That was Tim White and Leroy Morishita at East Bay and myself. And we decided together that that was really not in the best interest of the system, or the campuses at the time. I mean, it was, it was really a difficult time. It would be like having a wreck and then driving off. You know, we had to help. And so, was it my preference to stay on an additional six months? No, I was kind of ready. But nonetheless, it was the right thing to do. It was an easy decision, if that makes sense. And that was probably, between the pandemic and the racial injustice, and then having a president [of the United States] who kept making things worse, it seemed like, that had to be one of the most difficult years ever, ever. And only because you couldn't really see an ending. You know, it was like, "Really, this has got to go on some more?" But we all hung in there. And I think the lessons that we learned are incredible. I mean, watching a university pivot so quickly. And yeah, there were hiccups. There are always going to be hiccups, but we did it. And we and you know, we also learned a whole lot more about our students. We also learned a whole lot more about what we need to do to help our students, pandemic or no pandemic. And I think that we're going to take that away with us. I hope that we will. I think that we have learned that not everything needs to be face to face 100% of the time. Some people are anxious to come back and just return to normal which there is no--that's the past normal. But some people aren't. And so, we will have learned "Wow, I can do this a different way, and it's just as good." So, I think that we'll see some mix of the old way, the face-to-face, as well as some more hybrid and remote work. We know that, believe it or not, some students actually preferred online because they felt more comfortable talking up or doing something in the chat than they would in a face-to-face classroom. Some students desperately needed the social interactions that accompany face-to-face. And so, I think that we're going to see some differences with whatever happens post pandemic. But I think there are some lessons to learn. And mostly it's, "No, we don't need to do things exactly the same way as we always have." And I will confess, I was not a big remote worker advocate. Because I always believed that on a university campus, we need--students need to see people. If they go into an office, they need to see a human being who's going to be there responding to their issues. And that's hard to do if you're not available. So that was my pre-pandemic thinking. And now I know I've really changed to say, "Well, sometimes that's true, and sometimes it isn't." With our tele counseling work, we know students that are taking advantage of that, who never would have walked in to the Counseling Center in person, never. So, there are some good things to come out of this. And I hope that we won't lose sight of those.

[01:49:42]

JK: I wanted to pick up on something that you've mentioned several times. And that's this moment of racial reckoning that the United States is going through. And so, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind commenting on what do you think the role of institutions like CSUN and higher education play in this evolving national conversation around race and racial inequality?

DH: I think universities, and I will use CSUN as an example, have a tremendous role to play in this for many reasons. One is because we can have difficult conversations. We are a place that is--that prides itself on critical thinking and on valuing diversity. And maybe we can have some voice in how that gets evolved out in those communities. And the conversations around what happens with police. You know, we are training future law enforcement in our criminal justice program. We have an opportunity to train future progressive law enforcement that don't have the same mindset that some of the current law enforcement has. What can I say? I think we can model for others if we do that hard work ourselves. And I also think, whatever we do, we need to do it as a community so that we've got students, we've got faculty, we've got staff, that are sort of locked arm and arm and thinking, Yeah, this is who we are. And then take that message out. This is what we can do. Northridge, we're good at this. We're really good at this. I mean, imagine. That's what I hope, that would be one of my hopes for the future.

JK: Which actually leads me to my next question is, we're starting to see the light at the end of such a tough year. CSUN is transitioning to a new president. And do you have any hopes for the university and its community moving forward?

[01:52:07]

DH: Well, of course, I would hope that the University will continue to move forward on student success. I hope that the university will eliminate the equity gaps that continue to exist. I think one of my dreams is that Northridge will eventually have over 50%, you know, the faculty diversity will reflect the actual students and the student diversity that we have. I think that would be a huge success. The University is a leader right now nationally in sustainability, and I hope it stays in that position. You don't want to rest on your laurels or they wither away. And of course, I hope success in philanthropy, because that's really critical for future generations. I'm sorry that I won't get to see the opening of the new Conference Center. I hope it gets widely used. I hope the hotel gets built [laughs]. And I get invited back to see it. But I do think that, you know, when I first got here, I didn't mention this to you, Jessica, but Northridge had this legacy of having gone through the earthquake, right? And that was a big thing. And whether people were here for it or not, everybody knew that Northridge had gone through this earthquake. And it was a very traumatic time for the campus, even though the campus leaned in and got through it, and came out stronger on the other side. And I've always said, I hoped I didn't have the misfortune to be on campus when we were having an earthquake. Instead, I got a pandemic. But with that, I really believe that, you know, our students, our faculty and staff will continue to thrive in that post pandemic world because what we've just been through will make us so much stronger, and so much more adaptive and flexible. So, and I would end with just, you know, students always have to be at the center. And the minute you lose sight of students being at the center, you're off in the wrong direction. So, I hope students will always be at the center.

JK: And that's a beautiful sentiment to end on. I want to thank you so much for taking the time to share your story and talk with us about your time at Northridge in particular. We're excited that this will go in and become part of the University's permanent record. Let me go ahead and end our recording.

DH: Okay.

[End of interview]