Oral History Transcript

CSUN Leaders

Interviewee Mark Stover = MP

Interviewed by Jessica Kim = JK

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JK: This is Jessica Kim. I'm in Los Angeles, California on a Zoom call today with Dr. Mark Stover, former dean of the University Library at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). This interview will become part of the campus leadership Oral History Project. Dean Stover led the CSUN library from 2011 to 2024. As dean of the University Library, Dean Stover led a team of eighty-five staff members and librarians, as well as one hundred student employees. He oversaw several multi-million-dollar library renovations, cultivated and stewarded the first endowed librarian position in the CSU, and provided leadership for one of the first campus open access resolutions in the CSU. Immediately prior to his work at CSUN, Dean Stover held a number of positions in the library at San Diego State University between 1999 and 2011. Dean Stover also held positions at Calvin College Library in Michigan and Phillips Graduate Institute in California. His educational background includes a master's degree in library science from UCLA and a PhD in information science from Nova Southeastern University, which he earned in 1988 and 1997 respectively. He also holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in religious studies. Dean Stover has also enjoyed a distinguished career as a researcher. He's published widely on topics including knowledge management, ethics, reference services, library management, remote learning, and web design. Mark has taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels and has authored many articles in a variety of journals, including *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, *Reference Services Review*, *Library Management*, and *Library Trends*. He's the author of the book *Leading the Wired Organization: The Information Professional's Guide to Managing Technological Change*. He's also the editor of two other books, and the former president of the Association of Mental Health Librarians. He served as editor of *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* from 2000 to 2006 and was editor of the *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* from 2008 to 2012. Dean Stover is also the recipient of a number of awards and recognitions. He was the 2007 recipient of the American Psychological Association's Excellence in Librarianship Award, and the 2006 recipient of the San Diego State University Alumni Association's Outstanding Faculty Contribution Award. It's an honor to be with you today, Dean Stover, and to have you tell your story

and share your insights. So, we'll start very early. Can you talk about when and where you were born?

MS: Yes, I was born in 1961 in Newport News, Virginia.

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

MS: Sure. My mother was born and raised in Washington, DC. She was part of a large interfaith family. The family was very close knit, but they struggled financially, and I would say that my mother's family was usually at the lower levels of the socioeconomic scale, but they always made ends meet. My father was born in West Virginia, but he moved to Washington, DC with his family when he was about 10 years old, and so he grew up partially in West Virginia and partially in Washington, DC. His father, my paternal grandfather was murdered right before my father was born. So, my father grew up in a very poor family raised by a single mother.

JK: And what were your early experiences with education? Maybe fill in a bit of the gap, so that's your parents' background. Can you talk about your immediate family early in life, and then also your early experiences with education?

MS: So, my parents really valued education. I knew that from an early age, and looking back, I feel like they had instilled this respect for education in me and in my siblings. My father was in the military, so we traveled around quite a bit, moving every couple of years. I lived in Europe for the first four years of my life, and then I lived in various places in the United States. I went to 10 different schools, K-12, so it was really hard to put down roots, to build lasting relationships. But I always loved the classroom, I always loved school. And I also figured out ways to sort of informally educate myself through reading. That was always important to me and the house, as I recall growing up, was always full of books.

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JK: Do you think having so many different experiences in different educational settings made you interested in education?

MS: That's a good question. I think maybe it did, because I saw, you know, it from different perspectives. You know, I went to schools in different states, in different countries, and so that's—I've never thought about that before, but I think that's probably correct.

JK: And did your parents attend college? And in what ways did they emphasize the importance of education as you were growing up?

MS: Both my parents went to college. My father was the first in his family to attend college, and my father actually ended up with two master's degrees. So, it was, it was always an expectation for me to go to college. But, you know, I didn't really think about it very much until I got later on in my teens. I was more interested in sports. As a kid, as an early teenager, mid-teens, I wanted to be a professional baseball player, but that dream, died pretty early on. And I think I thought just a little bit about careers when I was growing up, but always loved school.

JK: So, there was this expectation within your family that you would go to college. So, as you were graduating from high school, was that just the assumption, or that was just the logical next step for you?

MS: I think it was both. Yeah, I wanted to go, and it was always the expectation too. My parents modeled that for me. And all my siblings went to college, so, you know, it was something that I think was expected.

JK: So, you're a graduate of Biola, can you talk about your experiences as an undergraduate, and include what you ended up majoring in, and what led you in that direction.

MS: Yeah, I really loved my undergraduate experience. Biola was, and still is, a fairly small religious college. And looking back on it, I realized, of course, that's not the best experience for everyone, but it was perfect for me at that time in my life. There were probably about three thousand students at the college when I attended, so I wasn't overwhelmed by huge numbers of students and faculty. And I also always had a part time job when I was in college, and most of it was working in the university library. So, I was very busy with my classes and with my part time work. But I still had a lot of time to continue that informal educating [of] myself that I talked about earlier. I did a lot of reading on my own, and, you know, looking back, I feel like it was a very nurturing time for me. And today, forty-five, fifty years later, I feel like I've moved on from that environment, which was very sheltered. And also, my personal religious outlook has also changed quite a bit too. But I still look back with a lot of gratitude, a lot of thankfulness for that time in my life.

JK: Can you talk a little bit more about what you studied, because I think that also led you to your first graduate experience.

MS: Yes, I was a religion major in college, and it was really interesting for me. You know, my family was very religious growing up, so that made a lot of sense from that perspective, to sort of study it on an academic level, in a formal way. And I enjoyed the literary aspects of religious texts and getting into the history of Religious Studies, getting a little bit into the theology, studying ancient languages. And after I finished my undergrad degree, I went on and got a first master's in religion as well. That just seemed like the logical next step for me.

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JK: And to what led you to—so you finished the master's degree in religious studies, and then what led you to pursue your next graduate degree?

MS: So, when I finished my master's degree, my wife and I were just starting a family, and I realized that two degrees in the humanities, two degrees in religious studies wasn't going to get me a lot of job offers. And so, the world became a very practical place. I guess I was sort of sheltered in the ivory tower for a while, and then, you know, realized, Oh, I'm in the real world. And so, I thought a lot about it, and I thought about my experiences working in college and university libraries as a student assistant. And I thought about the librarians that I'd known, and I read a little bit about it, and I discovered that you can actually make a living as a librarian. Not a tremendous living, you know, librarian salaries then and now are below those of engineers and attorneys and people who work in health care. But one of the things that I liked about becoming a librarian was that it would enable me to do something in my work life that I had always enjoyed, and that was to help people. And I also thought I would enjoy working full time in a library because of the intellectual stimulation, and I also had an interest in technology. So, this was the mid-1980s and personal computers were by no means ubiquitous at that time, but libraries were early adopters with technology, and I had some experience working with PCs and Apple computers and such. And so I applied to UCLA for their graduate program in Library Information Science, and after two years, I had a master's degree and was finally employable and well, I'll stop there.

JK: And then what led you to pursue a doctorate?

MS: So, after working—let me say this: the MLS, or now it's called the MLIS, it's got—depending on the university you go to—[in] some instances [it] has different acronyms. But the Masters in Library and Information Science is considered the terminal degree in academia and in other settings for librarians. So, it wasn't as though I needed to get a doctorate to work with a terminal degree, but I was really interested in pursuing

research in my field, and I was especially interested in emerging technology and how that affected academic libraries. And so, I began to study—in the early 90s—to study for a doctorate in library and information science. And eventually, in 1997 I did finish my doctorate. And the topic of my dissertation ended up being the usability of university library web pages. And this was—remember, this was about the mid-1990s. So, this was before Google, before Amazon. There were some early search engines but it was a very early and sort of unsettling time for everyone back then. It was exciting at the same time. We weren't quite sure where things were going. So, it was a fun time to do research.

JK: Were there any particular findings or more specific questions that you pursued during your research as a graduate student?

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MS: What I found—and remember, you know, my dissertation was finished almost thirty years ago—and the internet and libraries were very different places back then. But what I found was that most libraries did have solid websites and home pages, but they weren't very advanced, and the usability left something to be desired. And you know, of course, this is the kind of field that changes every day and every week and so, it would be hard to go back and take my findings and compare them to today. But I did end up publishing a couple of articles. [I] used some of my research in a book that I published a few years later. But I would say that my research is, you know, way, way out of date thirty years later.

JK: I think [that's] the nature of technology (laughs).

MS: Yeah.

JK: So, can you talk a little bit about your early career trajectory. So, between graduate school and coming to CSUN. You were at a number of different institutions, including San Diego State. So, just a bit about your experiences in those years.

MS: Yeah. So, my first professional position was at Calvin College in Western Michigan, and I was there for two years and had experience as a religious studies librarian. That was my subject area. But also, they put me in charge of the new automation system that they were putting up. So, they were transitioning from a card catalog, which many libraries were doing at that time—from a card catalog to an online catalog, an online discovery system. And I was in charge of that. And then we moved back to California,

and I worked for nine years at a small graduate school of psychology called Phillips Graduate Institute. It's here in the San Fernando Valley, and they mainly trained psychotherapists and school psychologists. And so, during that time, even though I didn't have any formal training in psychology, I gained a lot of experience as a psychology librarian, and that enabled me to move on to the job at San Diego State. And I moved to San Diego in 1999, and looking back on it, I would say that was an important shift in my life and in my career, but it sort of mirrors the way that I'd done things before, that I had often started out in small institutions and then ramped up and ratcheted up to the larger institutions. That's what I did in in higher education, going from, you know, a small college, small graduate school, to one of the largest research institutions in the country. And [I] did something similar in my work life as well. So, at San Diego State, I became a librarian and a member of the faculty, and being a faculty member was not new for me. I had been on the faculty as a librarian at Calvin College and at Phillips. And I'd also had experience teaching as an adjunct professor at various institutions, including Moorpark College and San Jose State University. But this was really the first time that I had been on the tenure track as a faculty member in a large, unionized environment. And I feel like I did thrive in that setting. After a few years at San Diego State, I was able to achieve tenure, and I was promoted first to Associate Librarian, later on to full librarian. And then even later, I was selected to be the department chair for the reference services department at San Diego State. And I enjoyed these new responsibilities, but I really wanted to continue to be a librarian. I enjoyed it. I liked working directly with students. But there were some personnel changes at the time in library administration at San Diego State and the dean of the library encouraged me to consider new possibilities—as well as the Associate Dean. The dean was Connie Dowell and the associate dean was Jon Cawthorne. And at first, I resisted, because like I said, I wanted to be a librarian. I wanted to be a faculty member. I enjoyed that role. It was fulfilling for me. But eventually I gave in, and I served in different administrative capacities. I held a position for a while, called assistant university librarian. And later on, I became the associate dean at San Diego State. And then, before I left San Diego State for a period of about six months, I was the interim dean. So, looking back on it those three early institutions that I worked at, which covered a period of about, I would say, twenty-three years or so. I learned a lot. It was incredibly beneficial to me and to my career. And I feel like I was able to give something back to the university, and I really hope that I helped a lot of students. That is my biggest hope.

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JK: Is there something that you found that you really enjoyed or found important and significant about working in the administration? Because it sounds like from what you said, that you had a bit of reluctance when you made that first step.

MS: Well, yeah, there were things that I did enjoy about it. You know, I think I wouldn't have stayed in library administration for very long if it didn't bring me joy, and if I didn't like it. There are some challenges, too. But the things that I liked the most, I really enjoyed being a mentor to early career librarians as an administrator, I found that I enjoyed raising money, talking to donors, getting donors excited about the mission of the library and the campus. And I enjoyed being able to create new projects. As a faculty member, you create sort of research projects. As an administrator, the projects are different. They tend to deal with renovations of the building—at least, you know, for library administrators—renovations and expansions of the building, or new initiatives that you think might help students. And there's a lot of teamwork that has to be done between library administrators and librarians, and library staff. These projects, for the most part, can't be done unilaterally. You have to get buy in. And I enjoyed the challenge of that. It was it was something that I think I was good at and I thrived at it. I didn't like it when we had budget problems. I was the Associate Dean of the library when, in 2009 and 2010, when the CSU experienced—well, there were very few layoffs, but what we experienced were [pauses]—I forget the word that we used—but faculty and staff basically had to take one day off a month unpaid.

JK: Furloughs.

MS: Furloughs, is what we called it. And it was a pay cut, basically because you still had to get your job done. You still had to get your work done. Nobody liked it. I hope we never go back to that again. Furloughs are better than layoffs. But I had to help guide the San Diego State Library through this difficult time. That was not easy.

JK: So, what brought you to Northridge and what attracted you to the university?

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MS: So, both my wife and I have a shared experience and a separate experience with living in Los Angeles. My wife grew up in Los Angeles, and we both lived in the San Fernando Valley in the 1980s and also the 1990s, and we both worked here as well. So, I was somewhat familiar with Cal State, Northridge. I'd been to the campus a few times. And while I worked at San Diego State, especially when I was an administrator, but as a faculty member as well, I discovered that CSUN was one of the largest campuses in the

system. And it always had a very positive reputation. So, as I began to become interested in looking for a dean position in the CSU or outside of the CSU, the job at Cal State Northridge opened up. The dean of the library at that time, Susan Curzon, who had been dean for about 17 years, was retiring, and so I applied for the job. I interviewed, and wonder of wonder, miracles of miracles, I was offered the position, and my wife really didn't want to leave San Diego. It's kind of a paradise down there, but she eventually gave in. And my colleagues at San Diego State were a little incredulous. They would talk to me about, How can you leave a research institution like San Diego State; a school that has such a great basketball team and a solid football program? And, yeah, San Diego State has a national reputation as a party school, too. How can you leave all this? But I really was very attracted to the mission of CSUN. When I interviewed here, I spent a fair amount of time talking to the provost at the time, Harry Hellenbrand. And Harry was a great supporter of faculty research at CSUN, but he also explained to me that really the greater focus of our mission was on teaching and teaching primarily undergraduates, and the majority of our students were often the first in their families to attend college. And San Diego State was at the time a somewhat diverse campus, but CSUN was extremely diverse. So, I really embraced this vision and the mission of the campus, and I'm really glad I did, because it's fulfilling in so many ways to be at a place like CSUN. I think our students are, for the most part, incredibly grateful to be here, and I'm really glad to be part of their experience.

JK: So, I'd love to hear more about the major projects that you worked on as you led the library during your tenure. I'm going to list a few, but you're also free to add others or pick the ones that you would most like to talk about. So, I mentioned two in your bio, which included the first endowed librarian position within the CSU, as well as the first open access resolution at a CSU. Other projects, other major projects, include integrating the Tom and Ethel Bradley Center and the Learning Resource Center into the University Library, the renovation and expansion of Special Collections and Archives, the creation of the Creative Maker Studio, the Library Learning Commons design as well as others. So, can you talk about these projects, their impact on the library, and as well on the student body and the university?

MS: Yes. So, let me start with the Bradley Center. So, for several years, while I was the dean of the library, in the early time that I was the dean, I had many discussions with a faculty member from the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media and Communication. His name is Kent Kirkton. He's retired now, but he was the director of the Tom and Ethel Bradley Center. And he had started the center back in the 1980s and it was called, then, the Institute for Arts and Media. And it was always meant to be primarily an archive of images that focused on photographers of color and communities of color; underrepresented communities in Southern California. And the discussions that Kent

and I had started out with how can the library help the Bradley Center in various ways, including applying for major federal grants? But then the topic of conversation changed at a certain point. Kent was interested in the longevity of the Bradley Center and he was concerned that it would sort of die off if when he retired. And he wanted to think about moving it to the library. And the rationale was that the Bradley Center was primarily an archive, and libraries are good at taking care of archives. We have excellent environmental controls. We also have lots of library staff and faculty who can help preserve these collections and help to curate them. And so eventually we brought this proposal to the dean of the Mike Curb College and to the provost and to other administrators on campus, and we received permission to move the Bradley Center to the library. And it's really been a perfect match for us. The Bradley Center has continued to apply for, and receive large federal grants, primarily National Endowment for the Humanities grants to digitize the collections that we have. It's also expanded to do oral histories and outreach to the community. We've also hired a full-time archivist for the Bradley Center. So, we have a director of the Bradley Center who is Jose Luis Benavides, who's a faculty member in journalism at the Mike Curb College. And then we have a full-time staff member who is really the primary curator of the collections. His name is Keith Rice. And a couple of years ago, we hired a full-time archivist as well. And the archivist works closely both with Jose Luis and Keith and the student assistants, but also does some community outreach. And also works closely with the other archivists that we have in the library. So, to me, the Bradley Center is a huge success story for us.

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MS: Let me talk about some of the other projects that you mentioned. First, I'll talk about one that really hasn't had a major impact, although we thought that it might at the time. And this is the Learning Resource Center. And when I was hired as the dean, it was already a fait accompli, if you will, that the Learning Resource Center was going to move into the library. The provost told me, before I moved up to Northridge, after I accepted the job, he said, "Oh, by the way, we're going to move the Learning Resource Center into the library." So, I didn't really have a choice in the matter. And the Learning Resource Center also, then and now, has a different reporting line. It doesn't report to the dean of the library, [rather it] reports through other lines in Academic Affairs. And so, we created a space for them in the east wing of the third floor, which is a very large space, probably about 10,000 square feet. And it was a little controversial, because library staff and faculty and others said to me, "How can we just give away all the space to an entity that's not really part of the library?" And this is really an issue that comes up all the time for libraries and for really anyone on campus, whether you're in Academic Affairs or not.

And it's a good reminder that deans don't control any space on the campus. And directors of centers don't control space. Really. The person who controls the space is the provost. And that's the academic space on campus, which is probably, you know, two thirds of the space at CSUN. So, theoretically, the provost has a better big picture view than anyone else of all the academic spaces, and he or she gets to make that decision. But like I said, it was a little controversial. Since then, the library and the Learning Resource Center have tried to work together, but we really haven't gotten traction on anything of substance. You know, the librarians will make referrals to the LRC and vice versa, but no real, substantive partnerships, unfortunately.

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MS: I think you mentioned the renovation and expansion of Special Collections and Archives.

JK: Yeah.

MS: So, when I first became the dean here, I was really happy that I was coming to a place that had lots of important and valuable and useful archival and manuscript collections; lots of great rare books. But the space was not ideal. It was a it was a smallish space, and it really needed to be renovated, and it really needed to be expanded. And I was sure of that from the beginning, but the big problem was money. You know, where do you get the money for this? And let me back up a little bit, because I was not a special collections and archives librarian when I was a faculty member. I always was a reference and instruction librarian. But I developed a great appreciation for special collections and archives because I realized pretty early on, these are the only collections in the library that are unique, especially the archival collections. These are important. These are unique. These are the things that can provide the primary sources for our students to learn how to do primary source research. For our faculty; for visiting scholars. There are a number of important books that have been written that have been based on research with our primary sources in the archives at CSUN. And so, this is all just to say that I had a great appreciation for special collections and archives. So, I was talking about the need for money, for funding to expand and renovate Special Collections and Archives. And it just so happened that a couple years before I came, the previous dean of the library, Sue Curzon, and her director of development whose name was Cindy Ventuleth, they had worked with a couple whose name was Jack and Florence Ferman. And the Fermans were nearing the end of their lives, and they wanted to make a substantial gift to CSUN, and they ended up giving a large gift of money. Part of it was put into an endowment, but part of it we could use to expand Special Collections and Archives. And we ended up using or spending about $2.5

million on this renovation. And the whole thing took a couple of years, and it was a team effort. The former associate dean of the library, Marianne Afifi, was the project manager, and Ellen Jarosz, who is still the head of Special Collections and Archives, was an important leader of the project, and we had folks from outside the library, from Facilities Management, from Academic Affairs, who also helped out a lot. And the space we have today is just amazing. And I really believe we're much better able to serve our students and to serve visiting researchers in the space that we have now.

JK: Oh, I can concur. I took students in before the renovation, and I've taken students in after the renovation, and it really is an incredible teaching space now.

MS: Yeah, yeah, I'm just really—I'm proud of it. Let me talk a little bit more. I don't want to talk too long about any of these things, but just a few more words about a couple of the other projects that you mentioned. The Creative Maker Studio, originally, when it was built in 2014 it was called the Creative Media Studio. And so, it's since evolved into the Creative Maker Studio. And it's basically a maker space. And when we started out, there weren't a lot of libraries that had their own maker space. Today, there are many libraries, I'd say a majority of academic libraries have their own maker space, or at least half of them do. And we decided—myself and the leadership in the library, and especially one of our librarians. Her name is Lynn Lampert. She was the chair of the of the reference and instruction department at the time. We all believe that libraries needed to evolve and maybe needed to expand our mission to include things like innovation and creativity. And how do you deal with students' curiosity? And these are things that books, and journals, and databases and even primary sources can't fully fulfill. And so, we decided to move beyond the bounds of traditional academic libraries and to build a maker space. And we did some research. We discovered that there's something called kinesthetic learning; learning by doing. Using your hands, which is a great learning technique. And so, we built it. And we built it, and they came. And we used a campus quality fee funding to build the Creative Media Studio, now called the Creative Maker Studio. Unfortunately, we had to evict one of our tenants in the library to do so, to use that space. The Friends of the Library had a used bookstore, but it was being utilized less and less by students, and it really wasn't making very much money. The money that was used was given to the library to use for various purposes, but it wasn't making very much money. It was using prime real estate. And so politically, it was kind of a hard decision to make. But functionally; practically, it was an easy decision. And so, today we have—in our maker space—we have lots of 3D printers. We've got a recording studio, high end video equipment, lots of other resources that you'll find in many other maker spaces. And something that I'm very proud of, is that we do have a number of other maker spaces on campus, but most of them are different

than ours in a couple of ways. One is that ours is open to any student at CSUN with any major. You don't have to be an engineering major or, you know, a media major or art major. You can come in with any major or none at all, and use the Creative Maker Studio. And the other one is, it's a fairly low bar to entry. So, there isn't a huge amount of training that it takes for students to start using our 3D printers or start using some of the other tools. And I think that's an important piece of the whole thing, and we play an important role in the maker ecosystem on campus.

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JK: Did you see any projects that emerged out of the maker space from students?

MS: Well, one kind of exciting project was that during the pandemic, we were able to make face masks. You know, the kind of plastic masks that come over your face to protect from infection. And so, we made probably several hundred of these, and we gave them out to local hospitals and doctors and healthcare facilities. That was one thing that comes to mind. I know students have—I can't tell you specifics, but in general—students have used the Creative Maker Studio for projects for their classes. But also, projects outside their classes. They've started businesses. They've just done things on their own to be creative. And students have told us—who've come back after graduating—that their experience working as a student assistant in the Creative Maker Studio was invaluable to them. They put it on their resume. That helped them get a job. Or, students who just came in to use it. They didn't work there, but they use the Creative Maker Studio. It helped them as well, to parlay their skills into something more tangible after they graduated. So, it's a fun place to be, but it's also a very practical as well.

JK: Are there a couple of other major projects that fell within your tenure that you'd like to talk about?

[00:44:17]

MS: Let me, let me talk about the Library Learning Commons. I'm going to take a drink (pauses). So, the Learning Commons got off the ground within a year or two after I started as the dean. And you know, again, there were some key individuals who were who are part of the of making this project move forward, including, again, Lynn Lampert, the librarian that I mentioned earlier. And the idea was to take what was an underutilized space that was, again, prime real estate. We called it our reference area,

reference department. And it took up much of the first floor of the library. And it was filled with thousands of dusty, unused, large reference books in floor to ceiling shelving. And it was kind of dark. There weren't very many comfortable study areas, and we decided to create something called the Learning Commons. So, we weeded out most of the books. We didn't throw them away for the most part. Although some we did, which were quite outdated. But most of them we just moved into the stacks, or into the automated storage and retrieval system (ASRS). And we kept a few reference books with a few half height shelves. But we tried to make the area much lighter, much more welcoming. We created lots of comfortable furniture with ergonomics in mind. We brought in two—so, we kept the reference desk, so the librarians still sit at the reference desk in the Learning Commons—but we created two more areas, and we renovated a third. So, the two areas that we created for the Learning Commons that weren't there before were a library technology help desk and a general campus IT help desk. So, there's two separate desks, and they help students with technology in different ways. The students in the library help to give out laptops, and tablets, and other devices. And they also help with printing issues, and they help with a variety of other technology issues within the library. And the central IT help desk will assist students with their email issues, with connectivity, Wi-Fi, with their account, and other, sort of, broader campus issues. And then the third area that changed quite a bit was our circulation desk, which is adjacent to the Learning Commons. It's more in the lobby. And the circulation desk, we rebranded as guest services, and we changed it quite a bit. Tried to make it more welcoming. And we also, in the lobby, totally rearranged everything and rebuilt the lobby so that now there's a coffee shop in the library. It's one of the six spots on campus for the Freudian Sip, which is the CSUN coffee shop. And so, there's the coffee house and adjacent to it, in the middle of the lobby, is a big seating area. And so, this did several things. One is that it very quickly became the highest grossing coffee shop on campus. And it also, I think, brought in a lot more students who wouldn't necessarily have come into the library, but the coffee shop was attractive to them. And I think it also created kind of an intellectual, stimulating environment. I've read a lot about the coffee houses of Vienna and the coffee houses of London in the 19th century, and these were major centers of intellectual thought. There's lots of important discussions that went on in these spaces, and I like to think that our coffee house is similar, that people are having wonderful, stimulating conversations over a cup of coffee. So, we've come a long way in the last 25 years in libraries. Back when I started as a librarian, and for the next fifteen years after that—fifteen, twenty years after that—libraries were not places where you could bring food or drink. You could maybe bring a water bottle, and that was about it. And then that slowly began to change around the time that we built the coffee shop. And, you know, really, now we welcome—or, we tolerate—we allow food in the library. It does mean that we have to spend a little more money for custodial services, for spills and things like that. But I think the tradeoff is worth it. So, that's the Learning Commons.

One more renovation project that I want to mention is the map collection. So, when I came to CSUN, there was a big map library in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. It really belonged to the geography department, and it was primarily maps, not books. But it was one of the largest map collections on the West Coast. And people who know what they're talking about tell me that it rivals the great map collections of some of the large research institutions in California, like Stanford and Berkeley and UCLA. And I can't tell you how accurate that is, but I think it is one of the biggest and one of the best on the West Coast. And probably about 2016 or so, the Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences started to talk to me about moving the map collection into the library. She was having space issues in Sierra Hall and wanted to move the collection. And it was quite a controversial decision that she made amongst her faculty, and in the end, the Geography Department ended up keeping the Sanborn collection. They've got a tremendously important and valuable Sanborn map collection. Sanborn maps are fire insurance maps that are not like regular flat maps, or topographic maps. But all those other kinds of maps, we did move into the library. We had to renovate a big space in the garden level. We had to move the Teacher Curriculum Center onto the second floor of the library. But we did all that. And today I'm really glad we did, because we've got a map curator and an assistant map curator. And I think a lot more students use the map collection than they did in the past because it was sort of sequestered in Sierra Hall, where a lot of students didn't really know about it. I think, probably, those are the projects that I wanted to focus on.

[00:52:13]

JK: I wanted to ask you about one additional project, because I think it's important. So, you also led the CSUN Library Tataviam mural project. So, I was hoping you could talk about that project and its significance.

MS: Sure. Right around the time of the beginning of the pandemic, I started to have conversations with Scott Andrews, who was at the time, the chair of the CSUN American Indian Studies program. Scott is now retired, but he came to me, and Scott said that he thought there should be public art on the CSUN campus that would celebrate the indigenous peoples of the San Fernando Valley. That there were, many years ago, indigenous peoples who lived on the very spot that CSUN now resides on. And these people were called the Tataviam people, sometimes referred to as the Sesevitam. And so, Scott thought that, specifically, the public art that he was thinking of would be a mural. And he thought that the library was the best place for a mural to be—where we have a very centralized place on campus. Lots of students and others come

into the library. And so, Scott shared his enthusiasm for this project with me, and I became enthusiastic about it as well. And I started to do consultation with other members of the American Indian Studies program; with the art department. There's an art commission on campus which is made up of art faculty, but also administrators on the campus. And as the dean of the library, I was a part of this art commission. So, I brought this up to them, because they make decisions about any public art that will be commissioned or purchased for the library—or sorry, for the campus. And I ended up getting buy in and permission from all these different entities. I formed a committee to think about it and make recommendations to me in terms of spaces in the library where this mural could be painted. And there was only one major hurdle that was left to overcome. And you could probably guess what that is, because I've mentioned this hurdle before, and it was money. You know, where would we get to funding to pay for public art like what we were thinking about? So, I worked with our director of development, whose name is Terry Kang, and we set out to raise money for this project. And we did! We were successful, and we ended up creating a jury, a selection committee made up of two members of the art department and one member from American Indian Studies. These are all faculty members. And we also agreed that the jury would consult with the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians and their leadership throughout the project. And we put out a call for proposals. We received almost fifty substantial applications for this contest. And the jury did a great job in reading through all those and selecting first semi-finalists and then finalists, and then finally, the winner of the contest, whose name is Lindsey Carron. Last year, she painted a beautiful mural in the library. It's on the first floor in the [west] wing. So, it's right adjacent to the Learning Commons as well as the Creative Maker Studio. And it depicts the indigenous people of the San Fernando Valley. It's a mural that combines history with, I would say, a reverence for nature. So again, Lindsay's vision was amazing for what she wanted to create and celebrate. And I'm so happy that that this project has come to fruition.

JK: Something you mentioned earlier, but the student body at CSUN is very diverse. It has become even more diverse during your tenure as dean. Can you talk about the ways in which the library shifted alongside the student body?

MS: Yes. So, you've sort of alluded to this. Maybe it's the subtext, but that's one of the issues that we struggle with at CSUN is that our student body has become extremely diverse in a wonderful way, but the faculty and staff have not become quite as diverse. So, there's not a mirror there. And sometimes that doesn't matter. Other times it does matter. But we would like to make our faculty and our staff more diverse. And so, as the dean of the library, I'm in charge of all hiring decisions, both staff and faculty, and they—you know, every hiring decision of a full-time faculty member or full-time staff goes through a

process. There's a search committee, and it's very regulated, very prescribed. And of course, there are legal boundaries around the hiring process too. So, what we've tried to do in the library is to make our applicant pools as large and as diverse as possible, and that gives us a good shot at selecting a top candidate who is going to have an appreciation for diversity, if not a very diverse background themselves. So, the hiring process is one way that we've tried to make the library a more diverse place. I will say this, parenthetically, that the hundred or so library student assistants that we have at the University Library at CSUN really do match the diverse backgrounds of the student body in general. It's just wonderful to see students from so many different backgrounds, different countries, different ethnic and religious experiences that they've had. And so, our student assistants absolutely do reflect the diversity of the student body. But let me say this as well, that our librarians, I think for many years, have recognized the importance of appreciating diversity in the acquisitions that they make of books, and of journals, and databases. And this is something that is a faculty level decision. Our librarians are in charge of collection development. This is not something that the administration gets involved with, and they choose which books, and which databases, and which journals we're going to have in the library. And we probably end up spending between $2 and $3 million every year on our collection development budget. And this is all just to say that, you know, diversity goes down to the granular level, sometimes, of which books are we going to have in the library. And how do we reflect the differences that different backgrounds bring to different disciplines; to the research project; to the world of scholarship and science. One last thing that I want to say about diversity: in the summer of 2020 we all remember, of course, the tragic killing of George Floyd, which was, you know, shocking to all of us. And I think that event and the protests that took place that summer, that was sort of a springboard, sort of an impetus for the library to create two things: One was a library Diversity Committee. And the other was a library diversity statement. And we created these—the library Diversity Committee makes recommendations to the dean about how to make the library a more inclusive, more welcoming space to reflect the diversity around us. And the committee also will create occasionally subcommittees. For example, right now, there's a subcommittee called the reparative metadata subcommittee, and they're addressing the problem of inappropriate or harmful language in libraries. For example, what do you do if the library catalog—we now call it the library discovery system—uses cataloging terms or subject headings, metadata terms which are antiquated, but also maybe they're hurtful or offensive. And this committee is making recommendations in that regard as well. So, those are some of the ways that we've tried to reflect and honor the diversity of our campus.

[01:02:57]

JK: What role do you see University Libraries playing in the 21st century, particularly in light of challenges like disinformation?

MS: So, there are a couple of different ways, important ways that I think libraries will continue to play a role in the academy as we move forward in this century. One of them is something that seems to have been around for ages, and that is fighting censorship. And censorship seems to be under control at sometimes. Other times it's kind of out of control. Sometimes censorship is mainly found in school libraries or in public libraries but other times it makes its way, believe it or not, into university libraries. And I think libraries are an important place for where faculty and staff can take a stand, and administrators can take a stand and say, you know, We are not going to remove these materials from our library for this political reason or that partisan reason, or really, for any reason. Really, there are reasons to weed collections, and I won't get into this at a granular level, but if there is scientific or health information that's very outdated and might be harmful, then you might weed a book that has that information in it. A better choice might be to put it in Special Collections, so that it's like a rare book. Because there are scholars who are historians of science who want to see these things that are outdated and were used at one time, or cutting edge but have become harmful. But in general, we want to make these things available to all of our students and faculty. There's another problem that has that has come up in recent years, and I think libraries can play an important role in it, and that's the issue of disinformation. So, I think the main role that libraries will play in this whole world of disinformation is through information literacy. And information literacy is something that libraries have been involved with for many years, through teaching workshops, going into classes, and talking to students about critical thinking skills; how to use databases; how to find the most reliable sources, and how to weed out information that you might find on the web or elsewhere that is not reliable and that, in fact, might be disinformation. Is the information peer reviewed? Or if it's not peer reviewed, does it at least have some kind of editorial oversight that was involved with publishing this material? And if not, then the information often is unreliable, and again, might be considered disinformation. And I do think that libraries have to be careful about interacting with disinformation, because we don't want to become partisan advocates. It actually can be easy to become a partisan advocate when the other side of the political spectrum starts to make outrageous statements, or it's [determined] they're just clearly lying about something. And again, I think libraries have to continue to point to, you know, what's reliable information. How can we be critical thinkers? What was the process that created this information? What was their purpose? And so forth. But libraries, you know, have always tried to be neutral, and these days that is a fairly controversial issue among librarians is our neutrality or lack thereof. You know, in the past, it was a no brainer that libraries would be neutral. But today, there are a lot of voices who say, Well, we can't be neutral

because we're all human beings. We all have our own biases, and we all have our own presuppositions, and we shouldn't be neutral, because there are things out there that are hurting other people. There's information that hurts other people. And so, I'm not going to solve, the debate about neutrality in this interview, but I do think that libraries should always try to provide different perspectives on particular issues. And sometimes those perspectives are or can be offensive, and I think that those shouldn't be necessarily censored because of their offensiveness. And I think there's a certain humility that comes with all this because university libraries are part of the academy and in our society, at least, you know, up until now, the academy has held sort of a privileged, elite status in the world. But I think it's important for all of us to be humble; that none of us have cornered the market on ultimate truth. I think we can get close. I think that's, you know, the goal of science and the goal of scholarship is get to the heart of things; what is objectively true? Of course, some things will never be objectively true because they're going to have multiple perspectives, and that may be more true in the social sciences than in the sciences. But I think getting to the heart of the matter is always important. And again, to recognize that disinformation can be debunked and can be countered. It's something that I haven't talked about very much, is the whole issue of generative artificial intelligence, I think that's going to make our job to train critical thinkers even more difficult because of things like deep fakes and other ways that bad actors can use misinformation to fool people and to get across their point in devious ways. So, it's not going to be an easy task as we move forward.

[01:10:15]

JK: A related question: what are your hopes for the library and the university moving forward?

MS: Well, right now, as we speak, we're all living in this difficult time. It's a time of financial uncertainty. It's a time of political unrest. And I think it's important for libraries and for higher education in general to be an anchor for society. I think maybe that we've lost some of the trust that we used to have with the general public, and I think we should try to build that back. But at the same time, I think it's important for the funding sources for institutions of higher education to maintain robust levels of funding for us. And of course, we're seeing the opposite happen right now. We're seeing defunding at the federal level of many colleges and universities across the United States. You know, in our state of California, we're seeing budget problems coming from the state legislature; the chancellor's office. Our own campus is trying to retrench in some ways and to become more efficient, and that hurts us. At least in the short term, that hurts us in terms of our initiatives and research projects and expansions and projects, and so forth. And you know, I'm not going to second guess what our own campus administration is

doing. I think CSUN is still fairly healthy financially, but it is important that we try to maintain good, strong funding levels and good financial health moving forward. I think there's some other challenges as well, going into the future. One of them is something that I've always struggled with, and that is how to make the University Library relevant for our students and continue to be relevant for every generation, every new generation of students. So, the ways that I've tried to make it relevant, I think I've mentioned some of these things already, most of them, in fact, you know, the Creative Maker Studio, the Learning Commons, the coffee house in the library. Something that I haven't talked a lot about is programming. I think that programming is extremely important for libraries to engage in. It's a form of outreach, and it's a form of in-reach. By programming, I mean bringing special speakers to campus, to the library, you know, celebrating different affinity group days or months or weeks in various ways, and just engaging with our students and with the community. So, we have to continue to do this and be creative about it. Another challenge that I think of, and I don't know the answer to this, but how do you get students to read more? And you know, maybe this is a lost cause. Maybe students in this age of the iPhone are just not going to do the same kind of long form reading that you and I used to do, and hopefully still do. But anything that we can do to get students to read more, I think will be important. And of course, something that I haven't mentioned that the library has tried to profile, is the leisure reading room in the library that's on the on the second floor in the west wing, right next to the library exhibit gallery and next to Special Collections and Archives, it's a great space for students to come and just read for pleasure. And it's very quiet, comfortable seating, nice lighting. So, another challenge—this might be the last challenge that I mention for university libraries in the 21st century is technology. And technology, as I mentioned earlier, you know, libraries have always been early adopters of technology, and that's a good thing. And some of these technology tools are sort of easy to engage with and easy to adopt. For example, during the pandemic, the CSUN library created a tool that allowed our students and others to chat online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with a librarian; sometimes during the day. And on Sunday afternoons it would be a CSUN librarian, and other times, at night or on Saturdays, it might be a librarian from one of the academic institutions that we collaborate with to answer the questions. So today, we get a lot more reference questions and research questions from our students via our virtual reference platform than we do at our traditional reference desk. We still staff the traditional reference desk, but we don't get as many questions there as we used to. But there are other more difficult technology issues that are out there, and obviously I don't know the best answer to them, because these technologies always bring good and bad with them. And you don't want to kind of cut them off completely because there's a lot of good that they can bring. So, I mentioned this briefly earlier in the interview; the issue of generative artificial intelligence, or generative AI. So, generative AI can already help students in a lot of ways. It can help faculty too. It can be abused and misused as well.

And you know, Jessica, I'm sure that you know what I'm talking about. In terms of, you know, students having Chat GPT write their papers for them, or things like that. It can be a tool that can assist in learning, or it can be a tool that can get in the way of learning. So—and libraries are struggling with gen AI and Chat GPT as well. You know today, if you if you try to ask a Chat GPT a question that you might ask a librarian, like: I need three peer reviewed journal articles on this particular topic. Chat GPT will usually find a few articles for you. But there are two problems that Chat GPT and most of the other gen AI platforms have: One is that they don't have access to all the premium databases that we in the library have access to. So, for example, the history databases that we have, or PsycINFO, which is the major psychology database that we have, or many of the other—we've got over two hundred databases that the library subscribes to that are premium databases that are not available for these gen AI platforms. And so basically, what gen AI will do, what Chat GPT will do, is they will find citations that exist on the free web, in institutional repositories, or on other websites, things like that. But they're not going to get the richness and the depth that you would get by looking through library databases. And the other problem—and Jessica, you're probably aware of this as well—is the problem of hallucinations. So, if you ask Chat GPT a question and it doesn't know the answer to it, sometimes it will just make up something. So, if it doesn't—I've done this a few times and it's kind of laughable if it wasn't so sad—is that it will make up citations if it can't find enough citations for you. And they sound correct. The author that they give does exist. She or he is a scholar or scientist out there in the world. And the topic does exist, and the journal does exist, but not all together. And so, I think that gen AI eventually will solve both of these issues: the problem of premium databases and the problem of hallucinations. But for right now, I think librarian's jobs are still safe.

[01:19:58]

JK: I tell my students, you are still smarter than Chat GPT (laughter). Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MS: Wow, we've covered a lot of ground today. I don't think so. It's been a pleasure to talk to you, Jessica, and I'm really glad that we had this opportunity.

JK: Likewise.

[01:20:24]
[End of transcript]