Oral History Transcript

CSUN Leaders

Interviewee Mary Pardo = 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. Mary Pardo, professor emeritus of Chicano/Chicana Studies at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). This interview will become part of the campus leadership Oral History Project. Dr. Pardo began teaching at CSUN in 1978, and in addition to her role as a faculty member, served as chair of the Chicano/Chicana Studies Department. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree in sociology from California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA), which she earned in 1970, an MA degree in education from the University of Southern California (USC), which she earned in 1972, and a PhD in sociology from UCLA, which she earned in 1990. Dr. Pardo has a distinguished career as a researcher, teacher, mentor and activist. She's presented and published widely in her areas of research, which focus on women of color and grassroots activism, urban sociology, women and work, and feminist theory. Her particular focus includes the work of women activists in East Los Angeles and the relationship between activism and cultural identity. This research was the focus of her book, *Mexican American Women Activists: History and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities*. Dr. Pardo's research interests are also closely tied to her work with communities of color in Los Angeles. She has been actively involved with Mothers of East Los Angeles, and work to document their efforts to fight environmental racism in their communities. She has also made important contributions to the growth and development of Chicana Studies programs like the one at CSUN. Dr. Pardo is also well known for her work as an educator and mentor. She worked for over four decades with the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) at CSUN, and won the Don Dorsey Excellence in Mentoring Award for her mentorship of EOP students in 2014. It seems fitting to quote a student on this work. Susan Amezcua, a student and member of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) reflected, "Professor Pardo is more than just a professor. She is an amazing mentor, friend, advisor and phenomenal role model who always supports the students. Her passion for social justice and education is

what motivates us, the students, to get involved in our communities and become the future leaders in this society". So, it's a real honor to be with you today, Dr. Pardo, and to have you tell your story and share your insights.

MP: Thank you. That's, that's very complimentary. (Laughs)

JK: When and where were you born?

MP: I was born in Tijuana. My mother was already a naturalized citizen, but she was visiting my grandmother in Tijuana and I happened to come a little early. So, I was born there. But we were living in Los Angeles, and so we move back quickly. And so, I grew up in the center of the city, close to Pico Union.

JK: What was your childhood like?

MP: Oh, it was a working-class neighborhood and very, you know, ethnically mixed and certainly changing. So, I come from a single-parent family and my mom was a garment worker. And so, I guess I was a latchkey kid, but I think that led to me reading quite a bit. So, I was always reading—nothing very academic. But I think that led to me enjoying academic pursuits—at least, elementary and junior high school. High school is a different story. But you know, I think reading was really important in my early years.

JK: Did you have siblings?

MP: No, only child, but I grew up in a kind of household where my aunt lived, and she was also a single parent. So, my mother and my aunt got together, joined their forces, and kept the household going. She was also a garment worker.

JK: I'm just curious, because you mentioned their work and then the neighborhood where you grew up growing up: Were they also activists? Were they part of the [ILGWU] (International Ladies Garment Workers Union)?

MP: Ah, no. And I understand, it was still there at the moment. And I'm sure there were important things that happened with the union, but they were more, I think, successful with larger shops. So, with the smaller shops, there really wasn't that much protection. And so, my mother and my aunt did not work in unionized shops. So no, they weren't active. You know, it was kind of a mixed bag there with the International Ladies Garment [Workers] Union. Yeah, certainly.

JK: What were your early experiences with education? So, you talked about kind of a love of reading from early on. What were your experiences as a student in LAUSD (Los Angeles Unified School District), I'm guessing?

[00:04:49]

MP: Let's see. Well, definitely, I think [it was my] teenage years when things changed. I was engaged. I was a latchkey kid, so I would walk home and that was most of my, I guess, my time in school. I think I was engaged in junior high. And then by the time I was in high school, I was not so engaged. So, I went to LA High for maybe a semester and then transferred to Belmont. And then found I was not engaged in high school at all. So that, and my major—and this is so long ago, so you're thinking 60 [years] or so. My major was called Secretarial Science. I don't think they have that anymore. But I was nowhere thinking about going to college. I mean, working in an office would be like a big step up from garment work. And so, my mom thought—she always encouraged me and she always supported me, but that was like the big step up. So, I was Secretarial Science, and not engaged. And actually, you know, not engaged at all in high school. So, by the time I graduated by the skin of my teeth, I worked in an office, and it was really boring—typing. So, a friend of mine said, "Let's go to community college. It's really cheap", I think it was like $5 or something, and it was so cheap. So, I started doing that part time. And then I kind of got re-engaged, and it was through a sociology class. And Secretarial Science was very boring, and sociology was very exciting. Although you know, deficient of course, in its lens. But that kind of inspired me and I just kind of took off and did the AA and then transferred to Cal State LA and Sociology after that.

JK: Before we move on to your college experience, do you mind if I ask what year you graduated from high school?

MP: You know, I think it was '63 or '64? I think it was '63. Yes, at Belmont. And at that time, I would say—well, it was still mixed. It was maybe a third Latino. It was a very mixed school—a large school. They had wanted to close down, but because it was so large, they couldn't. And now it just celebrated the 100th anniversary and is still going strong, I think. So, there was a mix of Asian, White, Latino, a few African-Americans. But high school was—maybe it wasn't class differences—but there weren't really very many teachers who were encouraging, I think. That's my recall at the time. Yeah.

JK: Yeah, and from what I've read about LA history and LAUSD during that era, that's not surprising.

MP: Yeah.

JK: So, you didn't expect to go to college, but were inspired by this experience, in a junior or community college.

MP: In a junior college, yeah, completely bored. And it was, ironically my high school friend, who also taught me how to successfully escape class and get the slips signed, the same one who kind of led me down that path, also was the one who said, "Let's go to community college". And so, it just really opened my eyes, because at that moment, that was '70—it might have been '68—no it was '68 at the time—no, it was '65- '65! Think about the height of the Black Panthers were coming in, Malcom X, Cassius Clay, talking away. And all these things- movements were going on, so that really inspired me. And I think that took me away from kind of a path that was not good. (Laughs) That, of simply going to an office and you know, and going out on the weekends and with no kind of higher goal. So, I think just the idea that there were the social movements going on really inspired me to pursue other avenues. And so, it was LACC (Los Angeles Community College) that had very few Latinos as I recall. Very few, I think, you'd count them on one hand. No groups. But there was this growing body of literature by African-Americans and so, I think [it was] a speech class had James Baldwin and some other readings that were so inspiring. It's just like, my eyes just opened up. And from then on, I was kind of inspired.

JK: So, then you transfer to Cal State LA?

[00:10:01]

MP: Yes, so I transfer to Cal State LA [in] '68, Sociology major, and taking the bus. So, all this time I'm taking the bus. My mother never drove, my aunt never drove. Taking the bus to Cal State LA, and I think that first semester there were—somehow, we found our way to a MEChA meeting. Well, it was an UMAS (United Mexican American Students) [meeting] at that time, and got asked to help with a camp-in. It was EOP, and they were just establishing EOP and fighting to—I forgot whether there were cutbacks, but there was a big on-campus camp-in. So, from there on, that kind of was my driving inspiration, just the student activism, and so many things that opened up from '68 and on, that I kind of kept going the next step. So, no plan to pursue a PhD, just become a social worker. I think that was my idea. And thank goodness I didn't do that. Because that's so tough. I completely respect social workers. But that, I think, I don't know if I could take the trauma that goes along with that. It's tough. Anyway, so I ended up at Cal State LA doing the BA (bachelor of arts) [degree] thinking I might go on for a master's in

social work. But that's when someone—it was actually a friend of one of the MECHA students who was recruiting for Teacher Corps at USC. And as I said, because there was so much in terms of social movement going on, there were opportunities. And they were really good opportunities. I reflect, I think they came to me, but I made choices. So it's kind of a combination, there was a Teacher Corps program at USC. And think about this, at the time it was paid tuition, a stipend of $90, which doesn't sound like much, but you could pay your rent on $90 a week. And so, it was a program where you get a teaching credentials and a master's in education. So, I got into that, and continued with that education and ended up teaching at Central Juvenile Hall. And that was the idea and the theme, which I fully was engaged in, was delinquency prevention through education. And I think back now to the abolition movement, and the fact that it's a kind of continuing theme. The idea was good, but if you're working in an institution, which is where I got my first job, but other teachers, they got a job on the boys' side of the school, and they call them TV boys, because they were like, from 10 to 13, or something. So they were the little boys, but the other teachers would say, "Carry a stapler in your hand." So, like if anybody attacks you, and no one ever attacked me. But it was just that daily kind of confrontation with control. And it was just, I just couldn't deal with it. I ended up taking the boys—this was the defining moment—I [would] take them to the gym, because I had them during that period when I would take them to the gym. And one little boy who was, you know—they were taking advantage of him in the bathroom. It was horrible. It was just like the last straw. And I couldn't go in the bathroom [since I was] the female teacher. So, I ended up quitting that job. I said, Not for me, it's too much like being a jailer. So, a friend, Avie Guerra, who was a counselor at EOP Supportive Services said, Why don't you apply for a reading-writing specialist at CSUN? And I had never even been to CSUN or the Valley, but I said, Well, what the heck? I did, I applied. So, it was a position in EOP. And that's how I wound up at CSUN. And kind of have to think at that time- that was '70- I guess it was '70. Yeah, it had to be '70, there were few Chicanas with master's and, and there were few people of color with masters, I think. I [could] probably count them on one hand that would fit into that category. So, I got the job. And from there on, I was working with students in the EOP program and it was a reading-writing skills academic lab.

JK: Just to go back to your previous work experience, do you mind if I ask what school you were [at] or—what correctional facility you were working at?

MP: Eastlake Juvenile Hall. So, downtown. I think it's still called Eastlake. But it was downtown, just a bit east of downtown. Yes.

JK: And how was that transition moving from that kind of work to CSUN?

MP: Well, you know it was a bit—it was sad in a sense. I had to give up something that I felt committed to. So, that whole theme of delinquency prevention through education was something I certainly endorsed. And it was two years, I was a teaching intern at the girl's site. And when I think back to the students that we dealt with—and Teacher Corps [was] a mix. It was like a rainbow mix of interns. And we worked. We took classes at USC, and then we spent time in the institution. It might have been three days a week, and I'm working either with another instructor or with students. So, I worked on the girls' side, and it's just so ironic that they would—and I don't know if they still do, but they would drug the girls who'd quote-unquote, "acted out" with Thorazine. So, half of the time a lot of the girls would have their heads on the desk. It was really sad. But I could see that if someone took an interest they could be inspired. So, I did my master's on what I called it—it kind of leads into EOP—I called it Aim High, and I took them on field trips to Cal State LA and we visited college classes. Of course, they loved the—what did they call it—the criminology lab. That's what they loved the most, which was probably the most interesting aside from all the others! And so. I took them on a field trip. We did this whole project, like about three weeks where we did visits, and I could see that some, you know, if there were just more investment in the individuals, and trying to develop their interests, you could see a turnaround. But institutions just don't seem to work that way. So, from there, and when I got the job on the boys' side, you know, it just was kind of a daily grind of control, half of them couldn't read. And then when I tried to keep them back. Some would stay back during the break, but it wasn't enough. So, it was just so demoralizing. Oh, it was really kind of a dismal part. But what was your question, Jessica? I forgot your initial question. (Laughs)

[00:17:52]

JK: I was just wondering [about] your transition from doing that work in correctional facilities to CSUN. So, maybe you could talk about your early experiences of CSUN. What the student body was like when you started on [this] campus. What your work experiences were like.

MP: When I transferred to CSUN, it was like, so familiar. And if you kind of think about [the] movement, Chicano Movement and they're a small group. So actually, at the time I was married, and my husband was going to law school, and my friend who told me about the job was married to someone who was going to law school. So, it was all kind of—everyone knew each other. I didn't know the people in the program at the time, but it was all familiar. I was familiar with EOP because I had worked as a tutor and an advisor in EOP at Cal State LA. So, when I came to CSUN and I started working in EOP, it was in an adobe house, which no longer exists, but it's kind of near the Chicano House, in that area. There was a tutorial program there and EOP was housed all there. So very

small. The campus was, of course, not a Hispanic Serving Institution at the time. So different. And it was just a matter of the growing of EOP, I think, at that moment. But the students who were in EOP. It was Raul Aragon, who was the director, at the time of support services, had all been MEChistas. So, it was all very kind of—it was kind of a group that had advanced, you know, gotten the first kind of wave of Chicana/Chicanos who got degrees, BAs and on to MAs and so forth. So, I felt very much at home. And EOP at that time was just going through a change where it was melded—I forgot what they called it at the time, but there was a Chicano EOP, and then a Black EOP, or I think they called it Black, or African American EOP. They had separate directors. But they ended up coming together, which [it] was much—I thought it was much better. So, the lab was small group instruction, and I hired like five or six tutors, African American, Latino at the time. And then the students were EOP students. So it was all—I would say, it was really a lot of fun. And at the time, I was probably 10 years older than the students. It was a really fun time. There still was a connection, so I was involved in the EOP programs, and then not so much in Chicano Studies because Chicano Studies was kind of way over there in Sierra Hall. But I still had contact and they had the students who were involved in MEChA and so forth. Yeah, and as far as outside of that, I think we were pretty much in our enclave, you know, in EOP and Chicano Studies at the time, [in] '70.

JK: Can you, for people who might not know, can you talk a little bit about the roots of EOP and kind of the philosophy and what role it played in, in student life?

MP: Oh, EOP was—and I always had to fight for this—for spots where students could come in without meeting what the standard was for admission into the University. So, not having the GPA and not having the SAT, which now we've thrown out the door. It's just so amazing! I guess as I reflect 50 years later, all the things that we had to fight against then, have now changed. And now there's recognition of all those things that seemed to be at odds with the institution. So that's a good thing. It's unfortunate it took this long. But in any case, EOP was a program, Educational Opportunity Program, that was intended to bring in students who may not meet the standard, but certainly had the spark and would be able to go forward. And so that was the focus. And the idea was to bring them up to par with the skills. And as I look back, and I think about [it], these students graduated from high school, but the skills, I mean, the skills were definitely lacking. And I always wondered, and I'd always asked if anyone had decent skills, where they went to high school, and usually, you know, it was where they went to high school. It wasn't ethnicity, and who knows what their SATs scores were, but say University High in West LA. Their skills would be really good. And it wasn't that their families had more money or more education. It was just where they happened to go to school. It was just really revealing. But at that time—and I wouldn't know what the

population was, so I guess you could see, but what was the Latino population at that time? Maybe it was 15, 20%? I'm not sure if it was even that high. [Pauses] I should know that, but (Laughs) you'll have to tell me. So, at the time, certainly the EOP and Chicano Studies was at odds with lots going on in the institution. Yeah.

JK: Do you want to expand on that?

[00:23:51]

MP: As I said, Jorge Garcia, and Rudy Acuña, they all have memories like, details, they remember dates and things. I just remember issues, a few issues that would arise and I think, from the ‘70s on. I mean immigration and immigrant status was certainly an issue. A continuing issue. So, when I think about the student activities, I mean the continuing issues were police brutality, immigration. Those were continuing concerns. And then whatever was happening on campus in terms of discrimination. And I just recall the way students—it's kind of like the key part that was so exciting about working on campus—that students would be our link to community in many ways. As well as our own interests, we would bring those to community and be able to discuss them, whether it was workers’ rights—and over the years, there’s just a whole series—workers’ rights, community rights. So, those things kind of spilled into the community—blended in and became topics for students to address in the classroom as well as in the community. I would think at one point staff—and they take the lead of whoever directs them—were asking for students whether they were documented or not. And I think that became an issue, I think [it] might have been in the ‘70s. You know, there was always something going on like that. Yeah, that might have been the ‘70s. And I'm trying to think of others. That's just the only thing that comes to mind at the moment.

[00:25:51]

JK: I want to come back to your research and ties to the community, which you were alluding to, and as you were talking. But first, I want to hear more about what led you to pursue a PhD and what led you to UCLA, and then what your experience is like there—your research focus as a PhD student.

MP: Okay. As I mentioned, I mean, from high school on, it was as if so many opportunities just popped up in front of me. And I would say because of that social context and political context of the time that I had to either accept them or reject them. But sometimes I think, Was I just so fortunate to go down this path? But in community college, that was one. Cal State LA, that was another to get the master’s, that it kind of [seems] like they

just came to me, but I selected them. And I had to pursue them and do the work, but I think I was fortunate.

And then once I was at Northridge, I worked well with students. I was also in a Marxist-Leninist study group. So, it's really kind of funny, because from Cal State LA, there were several at that time—moment in time—there were a lot of Marxist-Leninist study groups. And they were small groups, you know, left groups. And so this was a Communist Labor Party. There [was the] August 29th Movement. There were several left groups. And we had study groups, and we would meet. I was cleaning out all my books, and so we just came across these little—you've probably never seen them—but Pathfinder [political brochures]. And they're kind of little pamphlets. So, there would be like, marks in a pamphlet four. Those little books are like four. I looked at the price and go, Wow, $5. So, we would study these little books. I was active in that. And on campus, there were some left groups, although Chicano Studies—and this is at the time, I thought, Wow, they're so nationalist, they really don't have all these left groups. I came to learn later the rationale and why that made sense, because it was Acuña who always said, Oh they get in here and they start recruiting and then they're very divisive. There's a lot of infighting. And he was right, you know, [but] at the time, I wasn't in full agreement.

So, in any case, Acuña actually asked me to come over—and this was by 1978/1979—to teach a class on the Chicana, because evidently no one else in the faculty could do it, and they had had one faculty [member] and it was really a horrible kind of conflict; didn't get tenure. So, it was one female faculty [member] who did not complete the PhD. This is part of the Chicano Studies history. But she had gone to UCLA. I'm not sure what happened, but I'm sure she felt pretty alienated because it was a pretty alienating place. But she didn't finish and so she didn't get tenure. So, there was a gap. By 1979, Acuña invited me to come over and teach the Chicana class. I was still working in EOP. So, I started doing that, actually with Avie Guerra, who was a counselor. She has since passed, but she was a great counselor and a great friend. She kind of team-taught this class. Hardly any [readings]—nothing written. If you can think back as a historian, you probably—I mean, so little published on Chicanas in 1978. Very little, I mean, it all blossomed in the mid-'80s. You know, we started getting more things, but—so very little. So, we were scrounging around to find something. There was maybe one or two publications—very limited.

So, I started teaching. I really liked it. And so, it was just part time. Acuña was the one actually who said—and I think [it's] because he always wanted to get people who were active with students into the department. That was always his philosophy. So, he said, Why don't you come and teach in the Department? I said, Well, I don't have a PhD. He said, That's okay. That would be unheard of now, but at the time, you know, there were

so few PhDs—probably Chicana PhDs—you could count them on one hand. So, he said, Go to UCLA! So simple, right? I had no clue as to what that entailed. But I at the time, I was going through a divorce. So, this seemed like a good change. So, I applied to UCLA. I ended up getting in. Maybe the Masters helped, or maybe because there were so few women of color applying. I ended up being accepted. And so, I started in 1980 in sociology and [was] really inspired by the fact that—I said, Well, if I'm going to get into a PhD program, I can at least contribute to literature. It's just so faulty, and it was dismaying to see how little was available. So, I started there, as well as applied for a position in Chicana/Chicano Studies. Again, unheard of today without a PhD. But I had the Master's so I think there's probably others who got into [the department that way]. I'm not sure if that was a norm, but we got away with it somehow. There were others also.

So, I started the PhD program and then continued to teach writing skills. Actually, it was—I had a split commitment—writing skills and then courses on the family and adolescence because I had the experience at Central Juvenile Hall. I guess they figured that made sense. And I was in sociology. And so, I began teaching—not a good idea to teach and be in a PhD program. It was not good at all. But since some of the other male faculty had done this, I think there were a few others who had done this contemporaneously, teaching and also going through a PhD program. I did it, and it was horrible. And [at] UCLA, I can recall going to my first orientation and saying, Oh, I have to leave because I have to go teach a class. And I remember it was the big Marxists in the department, well, one of them, Maurice Zeitlin. And he said, Well, we're only here for you. And he gave me this look, that told me, you know, You really need to be fully committed! But I was clueless at the moment, so I tried to do it for a few years and needless to say, it was very difficult to create a link with professors and be present in department events. So, it was really tough, but I muddled through for maybe four years of trying to run back and forth on the 405 and do this and also teach and be involved and so forth. But I ended up taking a leave of absence. So, in '85—and that's where I really got into the research and found a topic and got some grants and was able to focus. So that was that.

But the PhD program was a major challenge. There was one professor, John Horton, who really seemed to be like the guardian angel of all those Latino students who were there. There were no—it's hard to imagine as I look back—no feminist scholars in sociology. I think, there might have been one adjunct, one or two adjunct women who were seldom around, and one who was a statistician. It was pretty sad, you know? And my interests were definitely in feminism and movements, and class analysis and so [forth]. At least we had John Horton, who was the one guiding light there. But as far as feminist scholars: not in sociology in the '80s. So, luckily, I could go outside and found

Karen Brodkin Sacks who's an anthropologist and she was a feminist and did class analysis. And another Puerto Rican woman, Ruth Zambrana. So, it was kind of piecemeal getting a committee together, but I did. Once I did that I took off and got into the project, and got into also community, as a research assistant for Monterey Park in East LA [and] was able to focus on my studies, but not a good way to do a PhD [Laughs] in hindsight.

[00:35:23]

JK: Really challenging!

MP: Yeah.

JK: So, can you talk a bit about how—you know, I think it's been an ongoing theme through your career, but you're a PhD student, you're beginning research projects, dissertation, and how you started to link your academic interests and career with your activism and your involvement in community organizations.

MP: I would say urban sociology was always my first love. I loved urban sociology, because I thought to explain what's going on in the city and to place women in the center of that narrative was really what I wanted to do. So, I didn't see how you could separate out and understand enough of what shapes a city and what shapes people's lives outside of movements. And probably because movements shaped my life, I think, and it was that interaction that probably got me to where I am today, for better or worse. So, at Northridge it was always about students and kind of supporting and being engaged, whether it was the movement against intervention in Central America, that was the whole ‘80s thing. Or, it was support for immigrant rights in the ‘90s. It seems like each decade had its movement. So, it seemed like that was always a driving kind of interest in what I taught. And so it made sense to be my interest in what I researched. And I thought, I need to write something that is contemporary and then engages, kind of what's happening now as well as reflects women as agents rather than just passive, which you've probably seen in sociology. It was just so dismal, of the depiction of Mexican women as a like passive, fatalistic. And, I had read those [articles] actually at LACC, but you know, I thought, Wow, they don't reflect what I've seen, they don't reflect my mother who has worked all her life, and was a single parent, and so forth. So, I thought, I've got to make a contribution to correct that, or maybe not correct it, but at least put in another narrative that that we can consider. So, I went to a meeting. I was searching for a topic, actually, and I was still engaged in whatever the movement thing was. So, that would have to be the ‘80s. So, still, it was intervention in Central America

were the major kind of concerns, along with others. So, I went to a community meeting in East LA and I saw the predominance of women and I thought, This is it, and Mothers of East LA was one of the groups at this community meeting. And it was about opposing the prison in East Los Angeles, this huge prison they were going to build within walking distance. So, that's how I selected the [dissertation] topic, and it just seemed to make sense to tell a story that showed women as engaged citizens, as well as kind of bring in all these other issues of race and class.

JK: And it was a movement that was in progress, so you could talk about it as it was happening.

MP: Yes, it was unfolding. They had started certainly a little bit earlier. But it was the beginning. Yes, it was, yes. I could document it. And I knew I would do ethnography. I knew I wanted to do something contemporary. So, it worked. And it happened that my advisor, John Horton, happened to get a Ford grant to research Monterey Park, which was going through this horrible, contested, kind of a demographic change with immigrants—Chinese immigrants and wealthy—coming from Taiwan and China. So, it was really pretty horrendous in terms of the racism that was happening. And so he got a grant to study community change and so I was able to get a job—take time off Northridge. It was such a privilege to be a full-time graduate student. Yeah, so that's how that happened. And of course, the other Chicano students who were involved, there was one other Chicano PhD student in sociology who was involved in Monterey Park with something called The Hispanic Roundtable and he was an activist and a lefty too! So, we had kind of a really good coherence in our team.

[00:40:38]

JK: Going back to Northridge, can you talk about—so you finished the PhD and then do you move full-time into the Chicana/Chicano Studies Department at Northridge?

MP: I was actually full time once I got the position. But yes I did. And then when I finished—it took me 10 years, but I say [it] had to be. It took me 10 years to finish the PhD but I always tried to console myself that they said at that time, seven years was kind of the average.

JK: Seven years without a full-time job!

MP: Yeah, without a full-time job. Except for the physics students. I had a friend in physics who did it. He said, “Why do you all take so long? We do it in four years.” But they always have a project, and [they work] closely with someone. And that certainly helps. But

anyway, yeah, so seven years. So, I did come back full time. I got a Ford grant, so that allowed me another year off to finish writing the dissertation. So, that was a godsend. So, that was ’90. I came back in ’90, and then I came back full time, yes.

JK: So, could you talk about the role and significance of Chicano/Chicana Studies at Northridge? You know, for the student body, for the community of faculty who become part of the department?

MP: Oh, let's see, you know, I'm speaking from the inside, right, the inside looking out, of course. When I came back, and I had the PhD, I certainly was invited to serve on committees. And at that time, was it Jolene Koester? I think it was Jolene Koester. So, she would invite me and I appreciated [serving] on different university committees, enrollment management, and so forth. And it was a moment when—if you can imagine this—they wanted to recruit. Maybe there was a decline in enrollment, and so the idea [of] enrollment management, of course, is always to keep the institution going. It’s always a matter of the institution. And when there's a need for more students, that was good, I thought, for us [and] for everyone, because then they wanted to invest in more recruitment. So, they were going to junior high schools and doing this kind of preparation. I'm not sure if they're still doing that, I hope they are, but they were. And so there was this push to get more students in because there might have been a slight decline, as opposed to impaction, right, which happened maybe a decade ago or so, when now they start closing the doors, and that always, I think, hurt students of color who for whatever reasons—like, students of color who want to leave South LA and come to Northridge to get away from their community and to have distance from their families for whatever their reasons are. So, I think the fewer choices, the worse it is for our students. But in any case, I was on a few university committees. But when you asked me to do this, I said, you know, I had really—from that vantage point, I always felt like being engaged in a lot of committees meant spending time at a level that seemed always to serve the institution, but not always our students. And so, it was maddening, kind of. So, I guess I did my share of university committees. And maybe it's better now, I don't know. But I kind of felt like I'd rather spend my time with students. Even when it came to recruitment of faculty of color—so we would get all the statistics, and we'd get all the recruitment, Let's revamp recruitment or blah, blah, blah. But [it] always seems like there's a kind of maintenance of the status quo. At least that's what I thought. So, I always felt like there's a shortcoming here. I think—and this is always Acuña's argument: numbers do change things. So, now that our institution, and you probably have the latest statistic, but it's probably over 50% Latino now. So, things have to change a bit, I hope. I'm not sure. But now I see that things that maybe EOP was doing now are incorporated, or the things that Chicana/Chicano Studies was doing at a time when it was on the boundaries of what the main practice was. Now that seems to be

more general practice. Maybe it's the numbers, and it makes sense. But institutional change, I think, is a hard nut to crack. Even—yes (Laughs).

[00:45:48]

JK: Could you reflect on the significance and meaning of having a Chicano/Chicana Studies department and curriculum for students? You know, as the demographics shifted at CSUN and for students who maybe weren't necessarily even majors, but who had the opportunity to take a Chicano/Chicana Studies class and to see themselves reflected in the University and in the curriculum? Yeah, [if you] don't mind reflecting on that.

MP: Yes, actually, our majors, for the size of our department, we have more double majors, which I always thought made sense because [of] our major construction. I would attribute that to Acuña. He was the master planner. He made it so it was a small number of units. Well, the minimum to do a double major, or even a minor, but the double major. And you could double count for GEs. So, all that planning, I think is what made Chicana/Chicano Studies one of the largest in the whole CSU system. But students could be double majors, and what I learned from many students and having advised lots—worked with lots of students—that students saw little of their experience in any of the majors. I mean, I would imagine that's a kind of no brainer, and I don't know how it goes now. It would be good to see what has changed in other departments, maybe in history. It's a good question [laughs] for you to address. What's changed in history! But they saw little of the experience of Latinos. And there was still a lot of, I think, awareness that needed to develop among faculty. I'm sure the newer faculty are much better now. But students still had to confront a kind of racism in the classroom. And sometimes it was subtle. We would have students say—Oh! Because they were taking the Chicana class, we're talking about the word—and I think this was '90s—[thinks] this might have been early '90s—"Exotic!" [referring to the word students discussed in class] The word "exotic" and how that's used in terms of [describing] women of color, and so forth. So, one of the students who was a soc (sociology) major said, The professor said that's just a word! Why are we contesting the word "exotic" And they could not make the argument and that along with, you know, other kind of little examples of that. But there was little reflected in the readings and the curriculum throughout. So, same in psychology. I don't know if things are changing now. But same in psychology, because we would have—Psychology and Sociology are the hugest majors, right? They have the most majors so, at least—I guess Child and Adolescent too, but they read little of experience of Latinas in anything that was required. So, when they took a class in Chicana/Chicano Studies or a class on Contemporary Issues of the Chicana, or History of the Chicana, any of them—we had about four or five focused on women. They were amazed and overjoyed to read about themselves and just kind of elated to think they

could relate some of their own experiences, or see themselves in—later on, of course—in publications. And I think the same goes for the culture classes—certainly for the history classes—in terms of having a feeling that you have a place at the table in terms of academia and curriculum and publications and readings and research. So, definitely [this was true of the Chicana/Chicano Studies] major. I worked with Chicanas in student groups. So, we had a little group in the ‘80s that created a Chicana Information Center. Because the center, actually the Counseling Center—and they do have José Montes now who's really wonderful. And they have other advisors. But it was really a difficult transition for a lot of Chicanas to come to terms with family and other things, being away from home. So, we started something called the Chicana Information Center in the ‘80s. We did that for a while, and we had students who were majors in—or maybe working on credentials in counseling? And they would volunteer. And so, we kind of had an ad hoc group going on and later made it—[we] got a little bit of funding, and would have a list of resources for everything from domestic violence to birth control, to all these things at the center. So, I think, it’s pretty profound. And of course, [I’m] an insider saying it was profound, but I think if you would talk to students, they would say the same thing. And this is of course prior to having more students of color on campus.

[00:51:14]

JK: Can you talk about mentorship? Because it seems like it was something you invested a lot of time in that was important to you throughout your career. So, could you talk a bit about your approach and your experience as a mentor?

MP: I felt like I could never give enough time to our students. It's something that really was gratifying to me because I could see myself in them. And thinking that so many times—I think Chicana/Chicano Studies was seen as a kind of refuge from other departments where they might walk in the door and be invisible. So, they would come to our department and our receptionist was—I think that was—she's still there, Yanina [Flores] She has such good social skills. She would welcome them. She was fluently bilingual. She would make them feel at home. And whatever they needed; she'd try to direct them. And as opposed to going somewhere else, where they were kind of ignored or kind of shooed away, because they're not asking the right questions. So, I felt that when I was chair, and when I was a faculty [member], I had an open-door kind of policy. And we were on campus much more actually. Now, it's such a big change, and that's not the faculty's fault. Well, we were actually, in the beginning, [coming to] campus three times a week then. It's changed to two [days a week] so, faculty were not there that much as before. And then of course, hybrid classes, and Zoom, and so forth. So, I think that that's a little sad that there's less faculty presence. But in any case, I felt like I just needed to put as much time as possible in with these students because, for example, as

chair, I would do advisement. I mean, I would accept whatever if I had an open space. I would advise it. I was always busy. So, it was nine to five as chair. At that time [it] was nine to five. And advisement if there weren't other meetings. But it was situations like [being with] students. I had a student who was very bright, very engaged. He was a former foster child. This was, let's see, [thinks] was this the last time I was chair? This is just one example, but not isolated. He was going to graduate and he had great writing skills. He was trying to get his siblings under his control. So, he was just all around a wonderful student. So, I said, “Oh what are you doing when you graduate?” He goes, “Well, I guess I'm going to look for a job.” And I think he was a sociology major. And I said, “Why don't you go to graduate school?” And he just was like—and this was a ‘90s, I'm pretty sure it had to be the ‘90s—[he] just looked to me like, What's that like? Who ever heard of that? And I think there's more, maybe more visibility now. So, I told him about it and he applied and he got in and [I think] he actually got the CSUN award [for] Outstanding Student. I think he also got that because he had such a compelling story. He had siblings who were in foster care, and he took them on. He became kind of their father figure. He went on and did a master’s [degree]. Just a wonderful person. But I think he exemplified how students just don't know. They are kind of a blank in terms of what they can do. And someone just needs to say, You can do it! And they can. And even if they're not as quite as outstanding—as his name was Carlos—as Carlos was, there’s still that potential. So, I think that always meant that I felt like that's where I get the most gratification. And that's where I'm going to put my time, as opposed to the institutional committees, which, of course, are important too.

[00:55:40]

JK: I wanted to ask—and we'll wrap up soon, because I promised you we'd try to keep this to—

MP: Oh, yes.

JK: —an hour! But I wanted to, because I know you were also involved in Chicana/Chicano Studies as a field beyond CSUN. So, I was wondering if you could talk about its really phenomenal growth over the past 30 or 40 years? And your involvement in it?

MP: Yes, it's amazing. I guess if you live long enough, you're hopefully going to see change and change for the better. But as I look back and think of one book, it was an early ‘80s, publication out of the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA, and that was on Mexican-American women. I remember it, *Struggles Past and Present*, and it didn't have any sociologists in there, [but] there was a couple historians. But from that, and then the ‘80s, and I would tie together feminists and people of color. And that push to

just open up this field to be inclusive of other people, which were kind of in the margins. I think that along with [others from] the mid-'80s—with Chicana publications, feminist publications. They were all in the margins. And Chicana/Chicano Studies was certainly in the margins too in terms of who published their work and where they were publishing from. But now we'd be pretty bad if someone didn't include some female, women writers or focused on women's work. So, I think Chicana/Chicano Studies has blossomed. And now I'm just amazed. I taught a grad class last semester. I'm just amazed at the students in terms of issues of sexuality coming into the whole center of research—methodological changes. So, I think Chicana/Chicano Studies because it's interdisciplinary, and at the time, I thought, Oh, God, that's so unwieldy because where are we going to fit when we teach our grad classes? We have to do everything. But now you can see that interdisciplinary work is at the center, I think, everywhere. So, it's wonderful to see the Chicana/Chicano studies as a discipline and as a major and as a PhD. It's kind of now, I guess—I wouldn't say it's mainstreaming, but all the things that we were doing then are now kind of, at least somewhat, in the mainstream—Interdisciplinary work, research methods, themes, issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality now. So, I would say it's really wonderful to see at the moment. Not that lots more [doesn't still need] to be done. That's for sure, yeah.

[00:58:43]

JK: I think that's a really good place to conclude our interview. Although, my last question would be if there's anything you want to add?

MP: Oh, nothing I can think of! As I mentioned, I wasn't sure about how this fit in with the project. But I appreciate the questions and just an opportunity to reflect. And it's a positive, at least to see the advancement and the number of students who have gone on for graduate work and PhD programs who have kind of benefited from Chicana/Chicano Studies.

[00:59:18]

[End of transcript]