

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

Narrator: Christine Connerly
Date: 1/30/2020
Interviewed by: Joan Hua
Place: Tacoma, Washington
File name: uwtlib_uwtoralhistory_cconnerly_access.mp3

NOTE: This transcript is a rush copy and has not been proofread; it will be updated once it has gone through the editing process.

Joan Hua 0:00

This is Joan Hua with the UW Tacoma oral history project, and I'm interviewing Christine Connerly. It's January 30, 2020, and we're in the UW Tacoma Tioga library building. So Christine, can you start by stating your name and telling us a bit about yourself first?

Christine Connerly 0:21

Definitely. Yes. My name is Christine Connerly. However, during the time that I was at UW Tacoma, I was known as Chris Benton at that time. I was married to a local architect. And anyway, I've changed my name since then to Christie and back to my original name, which is Christine Connerly. And I had grown up in Tacoma. And I actually went to elementary school, junior high, high school, and I went to Pacific Lutheran University as an undergraduate and got my undergraduate degree in English and my teaching credential there. And so Tacoma is very, very, very, very important to me. It is my hometown. And I remember we moved to Tacoma when I was four years old. And I remember back in the day in the 60s coming down to downtown Tacoma and going to the department stores to buy clothes and all these things and my sister and I used to ride the bus to downtown Tacoma and go to the Woolworth's and do different things downtown. So after they built them all and downtown Tacoma just completely emptied out and became a very derelict, rundown place. Very sad. And so it was really interesting to me because of how Tacoma, I've always looked at as kind of the ugly stepsister of Seattle and I ended up going to university Washington Seattle campus for my master's degree. And so going from, from being a very much Tacoma person and living like the first formative years of my life, in Tacoma, and then going to University of Washington and Seattle, when I would tell people in from Tacoma and things there were different comments and different reactions. And it was, people didn't always have a very positive impression of it. They talked about the aroma of Tacoma and how badly it smelled because of when I was growing up. There was a smelter not too far away from our house, and it would smell like rotten eggs sometimes, and there was a rendering plant and you know, lumber and paper products and things. And so, yeah, there it was. It was part of the gritty history of Tacoma. It's a blue collar place. And it was

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

just part of what made Tacoma successful city in many ways, but it also kind of affected People's impression as they would drive by on the freeway. And they didn't necessarily have a real positive impression of it. So I got my teaching credential at PSU, and then went to University of Washington. Because I had decided there were not a lot of teaching jobs available. And I applied to a lot of different places, but there just weren't teaching jobs. And I did finally get hired as a part time remedial English teacher at Pierce College, which was then known as Fort silicum Community College. And I loved working with the students there. I love the community college students. They were diverse in ages and backgrounds. We had international students that were coming to mainly to learn English. We had students fresh out of high school, we had active duty military. There were veterans, people with disabilities, different ages, people coming back to school to for different jobs and things. And it was a really wonderful experience. And I realized I liked working with college students more than high school students and decided that after substitute teaching, getting an idea of teaching,

Junior High in high school versus working at the community college, I really really, really loved working with community college students and college students in general. So I ended up going to the University of Washington, got my master's in English literature, with the goal of teaching community college but didn't really realize that how competitive it was to try to get a full time position there at the time. My husband at the time was in architecture school and graduate school at the University of washing And I ended up getting after I got my degree. And there were no teaching jobs available. I ended up getting hired just in the graduations office at University of Washington. And the part I really loved about that job was the little bits of advising I got to do, working with students to help them figure out well, if you didn't take the right courses, and your your unit short or whatever, of graduation, how can we help you kind of get back on track, and I ended up going from graduations to the admissions office, and I was a transcript evaluators so I reviewed transcripts for admissions for transfer students. And then I became an admissions counselor, and actually did a lot of recruiting and going out and doing talk talking to high school community college students. And I would meet with a lot of general public used to do big presentations in the University of Washington was always so popular that we'd get like, there'd be like 100 or more students that would come to the presentation for University of Washington. So I had a lot of public speaking experience from that it was a little intimidating at first, but I got to really know and understand, kind of, and be able to articulate the value of higher education, and specifically at University of Washington. And really help students kind of figure out what they wanted to do, and whether UW was right for them. So Meanwhile, my husband and I were living in Seattle, and we wanted to buy a house, and prices were way out of our reach for anything halfway decent. And he was working at the time in Edmonds, and I was working at UW in Seattle in the admissions office, but we ended up buying Home and Tacoma, which is where we were both from we both graduated from high school here. And our parents lived here. And we ended up finding a really lovely little home not too far in the north end. So it was kind of the UW Tacoma opening right at that time, it was in 1990 that we bought our home. And people were asking me, so are you going to because we did the commute, where he would drop me off at UW Seattle, and then drive on to Edmonds, and then pick me up on the way home and it was like, long days really exhausting and a heck of a long commute. Probably not

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

quite as long as now because traffic was I don't think quite as bad then. But it was still pretty bad. And then I got pregnant, and I was like, I don't want to have to commute to Seattle while having a baby. So I applied at the University of Washington Tacoma and I there's a halftime counseling job. Academic Advising job that I thought would be great given that I was going to be having a baby soon and but they talked me into another job that they ended up calling for the official title was assistant director of admissions, registration and community outreach. And I discovered shortly after, and they talked me into it because I, I knew all the person who was actually in charge of hiring at that time was Mike McGee. And he had actually been, I've worked with him in the admissions office at the University of Washington. And so he knew that I knew all the articulation agreements with the community colleges, I knew the admission requirements. And he really wanted me in that position so that I could and he knew I've done public speaking and all of those things. So he convinced me that that would be a great job for me. And I discovered after I was hired that I was actually the first person hired in studio services. So I was the assistant director, however, there was no director.

So it was quite a challenge to get started with and the before I actually started, they had hired a couple of other staff that I was not in on, but most of the hiring decisions after that and Student Services I was involved with and helped make those decisions. So I probably worked at least a month, maybe maybe a little bit more than that before we actually had a director as the assistant director.

Joan Hua 9:34
And who was that?

Christine Connerly 9:35
It was Steve Smith.

Joan Hua 9:36
Okay. Yeah. Right. And so before you go on to talking about what your work was like, can I ask you: so you had grown up in Tacoma and knew it intimately, and you've seen it transform through the decades. What was it like? Do you remember hearing about there being a UW Tacoma and what was your reaction?

Christine Connerly 10:03
Yes, I am when I was working at University of Washington in Seattle and the admissions office, of course, we had heard about, you know, I knew that the Tacoma campus was going to open. And at first I wasn't. Well, I wasn't really that surprised in some ways, because it admissions was extremely impacted in Seattle. And it was very hard to get in. And we were told by, I think it was Mike McGee, who was working in the admissions office at that time to be vague, that positive when we would talk to people about admissions, because most likely they weren't going to get in because it was just there. They had kept enrollment at 33,000. And we would get way more epic. The number of applicants we could admit was really small. So I knew that it was really heavily impacted and there was a huge problem with access. And when I first heard about

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

the campus, I knew it was for place-bound students who weren't able to commute to school. Seattle. And I was intimately involved with that as well. Understanding of that because my when we first moved to Tacoma, my dad was a minister. And he left the ministry and went decided to become a teacher. And we actually commuted during the summer, he actually committed up to University of Washington, Seattle, and I was very little, I was like preschool age, or barely, like, you know, second third grade, something like that. And so my sister and I would wander around campus. And while my dad was in class up there, and we would stay in the summer, we stayed in a trailer park so that he could actually access University of Washington, Seattle and get his teaching credential. And it was obviously difficult for our family. My mom was already a teacher in Tacoma. And so my dad had to commute our whole family had to deal with having to go to Seattle. All so that my dad could change his career. And it turned out to be obviously a great thing for our family. And with both teachers. It was more a stable career for him and but it was really difficult and challenging. So I, when I heard that there's going to be a branch campus in Tacoma, I thought this is excellent, because people like my dad who were wanting to change careers, mid careers, older people, and I and the people who wanted to transfer from community colleges, there wasn't room for them at University of Washington, Seattle. And there, it was difficult for some people to to leave jobs or leave, you know, young children, very difficult for them to access. And because, you know, UPS and PLU are both very expensive, private institutions. It wasn't the right answer for everybody. And so I was extremely happy and I knew it was going to be A great thing for to comment to have that I was concerned because appeal you as my alma mater and I was like, Well, I hope it's not going to compete but then initially it was only upper division for second and third year students.

UPS, it wasn't quite as much of a competition because most of the students come from out of state peel you has more local students, so it was probably more concerned about impacting them. But because of the cost appeal you and financial aid wasn't always able to cover everything. It definitely was able to meet a need. So I was extremely happy that they were going to have the campus but also not sure how it was all going to work out. And I was initially a little reluctant to apply to work here. Because I felt like it's gonna be really chaotic and really crazy. And, and maybe it would be better to wait until things settle down a little bit and Which, as it turned out, they probably really didn't. And maybe still haven't ever really settled down here because it's still a relatively new campus. And it the growth was so fast so quick that I think it just created a kind of a very intense, but wonderful learning opportunity. And so I think the I remember hearing the discussions to about the locations and where they were going to be. And my ex husband had gone to Tacoma Community College and of course, that was one of the locations they considered was the colocation with Tacoma Community College. And that was very popular with the community. A lot of people were very, really thought that just made a lot of sense. But I think I remember the Higher Education Coordinating or there was a South Puget Sound, I think coordinating Higher Education Board. Yeah. And, and I remember hearing them talk and going to some of the meetings Some things early on, and they were definitely wanted it, they were clearly leaning in the direction of wanting it to be in the downtown area. And at that time downtown Tacoma, they had been working on the turning Union Station into the courthouses, which was great because I remember going to Union Station we used to take the

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

train to Denver to visit relatives my grandmother come in and I remember when it was still relatively okay not to derelict and then over the years, the, the lights were going off in the ceiling, ceiling tiles were falling, it was it was getting to be really, really bad. And then they finally just, you know, closed it and opened up the Amtrak station elsewhere, because it was so, so bad. And I was really excited and my ex has me being an architect. He was very into historic preservation. We both love to comment and he really loved the architecture of downtown Tacoma. historic buildings he actually wrote papers for architectural history about, like the medical arts building the Art Nouveau, our art deco details of that building. And we love these buildings and in the, in the there's a saying I guess that in the kind of saved a coma from tearing down all these buildings was because it was in an economic slump, actually in the 70s I believe it was. And so when a lot of cities were tearing down their old buildings and rebuilding, they didn't have enough money to do that. So they did do some things that didn't work out very well like the Broadway Plaza, were they and that just was a mess. And they tried some other things that didn't work. They were really awkward and but they these buildings were still here, and they were they were excellently built and still salvageable. So, I was excited about UW Tacoma for access for students who couldn't get here. Otherwise. I I was excited. I thought I really liked the idea of the downtown location. But I knew why people objected to it and we're so concerned.

Joan Hua 17:08

But the downtown location--that discussion you're hearing from the South Puget Sound Higher Education Council, that was when you were already working here, right? Wouldn't that be after the university had opened?

Christine Connerly 17:22

The university had opened at the Perkins Building. The decision about, no, the decision was not finalized about--I think it kind of was in the minds of some people, but there were other community members who still felt strongly that it should be elsewhere. So it had been kind of it was decided, but it was still there was still some some question and there were still people that were trying to like advocate for it to be at TCC and have it kind of be more co-located.

Joan Hua 17:56

And I'm still thinking about when you were deciding whether or not you wanted to take the job at UW Tacoma. It wasn't necessarily a job in downtown Tacoma at the time.

Christine Connerly 18:09

Oh, it was because it was in the Perkins Building, which is definitely downtown Tacoma.

Joan Hua 18:13

Right.

Christine Connerly 18:14

And I knew at that time that that the decision had really been made for it to be in Tacoma, in downtown Tacoma. But I know there were still people that were kind of pushing to change that.

And there were still some pushback to come as has very strong feelings about a lot of different things and and there's a lot of controversies about art, for example, like the art at the Tacoma dome with the neon wars. There's just something that Mike, Michael Sullivan's written about really eloquently. And that actually impacted that public art, I think, here at the Tacoma campus as well. And because in 1985, when they built the Tacoma dome they put out they had a half percent sent for art for public construction that was supposed to go that half a percent. I think it was a public construction funds were supposed to go to fund public art. And that was something that was kind of controversial in the 80s. public art was still somewhat controversial nationally because they, now the National Endowment for the Arts has sponsored, Robert Mapplethorpe, and there's all this controversy about his photographs and things like that. And so in Tacoma, they wanted this with Arts Commission and another group wanted to connected with the architects wanting to put this Anna takus I think goes nameless, he he was an artist, a neon artist, and he wanted to put neon on top of the Tacoma dome. And the contractor of the roof said, Oh, no, it can't do that. Because I can't guarantee that the roof won't leak. And so you can't you can't do that and people in the community There were no neon people. And then there were the pro neon people. And it got to be so controversial and so heated and people were so worked up and angry that they actually ended up repealing the half percent for art. And so for public art, and because of they felt that the art project was being pushed down their throats, they decided, well, we just won't don't want to support public art because it's not really public art because the public didn't really have a say, and I think that was a really telling piece of how the community really likes to be involved in in how and making decisions. And that was something I think in terms of the coma campus and what they wanted it to be people had different visions for it, and definitely the South Puget Sound, what would they the Higher Education Council. They really wanted to be part of the renovation. revitalization of downtown Tacoma and there was so much happening 1990 was a huge explosion of Tacoma Renaissance and the campus was part of it the federal courthouse Union Square, the pantages theatre, that theater district being redone with the alto to comm Arts Commission was very active. They had a commencement Art Gallery downtown that the Arts Commission was running that was excellent. And then of course, the renovation of these buildings to help draw people into the downtown but most people still looked at downtown it's like this place: "They're only bums down there, and there's only drunk people," and, "Who wants to go down there? It's disgusting. It's falling apart, and it's dirty, and it's gross." And unfortunately also the Hilltop area had been featured prominently in shows about America's most wanted and all these, really, like, things about ... they were featured in very negative ways, making it sound like Tacoma was, you know, you're gonna get shot if you come to anywhere near there. And it's this horribly violent, terrible place. And so there was a lot of fear about the downtown of Tacoma. And it was, instead of thinking, "Oh, well, if we put something really good down here, it's going to create a renovation and it's going to create a positive energy around this," it was more like, "Oh, no, you can't put it down there because it's bad." Instead of thinking: if we put it down there, maybe it won't be so bad, maybe it will become better, and there was kind of some negative energy around it. So it took a lot of convincing and I think there was definitely some people that were slow to come around to the idea but once it was kind of finally decided, and they started really moving forward with the plans. I think people and then other things were happening with the theater district. There was some there was a downtown art

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

project, the masks project where they had tried to with the Tacoma Arts Commission had worked on putting me to say, Do you know anything about the mouse project downtown, and they had put in masks of like different representing different cultures because to call my is a very culturally diverse place. And they had sort of more African American type things. They had Native American tribal representations, some Hispanic kind of related things. And it was a really cool project. And they're still some of them are still still down here. So there are a lot of different kinds of things. I'm really trying to kind of honor the history of Tacoma, which is a complex history in many ways, and a very diverse history. And there's some things that were very gritty and you It's a it's a working class blue collar kind of a town that was built on lumber and on industry and the smelter and all these different things, but it's also this was pure tribal land. And there's a very specific diverse neighborhoods. There was the, the Japanese language school that was adjacent here that was on this campus. I think it was right over there. And the building was still there when we first opened the campus. But the there had been the Chinese had been run out of the coma. It had been, you know, there's a lot of really negative history in terms of how people have been treated and so and how Native Americans have been treated. There are huge fishing rights issues when I was growing up in the 70s. And there was a judge bolt decision that allowed tribes to have access more access to fish. rights there, which was part of their Treaty anyway, and they should have always had it but they were kind of getting pushed out. And so there was a I remember seeing bumper stickers that said things like, can judge bolt and they were really people were really angry because the sports fishermen and the commercial fishermen were really angry that that the native peoples whose land it actually was and who were, by treaty supposed to have access to that, to those fishing rights that they were being given access again.

So there was a lot of contentious history and Tacoma and a lot of different things that I think kind of led to people having some objections to the campus being downtown and kind of felt like oh, no, we want to develop more in the newer areas of the city because which just abandon this and let it all go and I don't know what they thought would should happen down here. But I'm very grateful that they ended up not deciding to do that. It, it definitely has, you know, being in the Perkins Building was was an interesting start because of course, it was a historic building. And it had been kind of a newspaper, originally, you know, become a newspaper site and it was a crazy building to start out in, because I remember I was listening to part of Claudia Gorbman interview and she talked about the big square pillars that were going through the rooms and so most of the classrooms had places where they couldn't see he couldn't see the board and he couldn't, you know, the whiteboards and it was so real there were some definite challenges problems with the elevator would break down all the time so it would only like go to one floor. And and then the heating was always fun because it was a steam heaters and they were radiators in the in the offices and so in the winter, you had to either like turn Heat off and freeze or turn the heat on and open the window because otherwise it was just too hot in there. So there were some really funky kinds of things. There was no food service available. There were very few restaurants downtown, there were a few. And like there's still a Vietnamese restaurant. I think the old Spaghetti Factory there were just like a few restaurants that were downtown. But there wasn't, we were it was a big thing. We didn't have the evening to get vending machines

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

and so that students could get a snack, you know, something from getting a coffee machine put in because initially there was nothing there were no services whatsoever.

Joan Hua 27:39

I liked how also you talked about learning that UW Tacoma would serve who they called, at the time, place-bound students and how you had a personal experience with that, seeing your father traveling to UW Seattle, and also how when you worked at Pierce College, you realize that you really enjoyed working with community college students. So can you talk a bit about what the students were like and how that felt when--having those personal experiences, how that felt when you did end up working in Tacoma and being part of the transformation?

Christine Connerly 28:26

Definitely. Yes, it was. I loved the I have always enjoyed working with returning students, because they really know what they want. And they were very eager to learn and it was the students that were coming in were mostly they were adult students, and I had chosen to finish my undergraduate degree and my master's degree before I decided to have children. So I was pregnant. While many of the people that were coming in were especially there were a lot of women. A lot of women going back to school Because they had helped support their husbands to get through school, and had gotten their children off to school. And so they were had done all of that first. And now we're coming back to finish their education. So we had almost kind of done flipped experiences. So they would give me advice about, you know, having children and child rearing and having a baby. And I would give them advice about education and going and finishing their degrees and figuring out what they wanted to do with their careers. So that was really satisfying, because I felt like I had that interesting connection with them. And a lot of the students, they were coming in, maybe they had gone as freshmen to University of Washington, 20 years before that, or 10 years or whatever. And they had done really poorly because they didn't know what they wanted to do. They didn't have any life experience. And so some of them their GPAs were not maybe it wouldn't have been admissible to University of Washington, Seattle. But any recent coursework they had was excellent. And we made some more exceptions for admission, because at the beginning, it was trying to get people to take a chance on this place when it was kind of unknown and untested. And people didn't really know what it was yet was, you know, a little bit of a challenge. And so sometimes we were a little more flexible, as long as we could see that there was evidence that these students could be successful. They've had successful careers, some of them in banking and different areas. Pat McCarthy, who's now a local politician was one of the early students there and was also working on campus. And she had been one of those people who had helped her husband get through school and became a judge and everything and she was on the school board, but had just had a little bit left to finish her her bachelor's degree. And so it was a really exciting time in terms of like trying to Talk with adult, the adult students. And they were just unfired to learn most of them. There were some people that were probably not quite ready, you know, they still needed maybe some additional work. And I was trying to like help, the committee helped them figure out what to take to make sure that they were adequately prepared. But a lot of the early students had had enough life experience and were work experience all kinds of different perspectives on things

that when they got into the classroom, they were just, they were on fire to learn and they were really excited about it. And some seemed a part of Sarah Contreras this interview and she talked about one specific specific student who because her husband didn't like that she was coming back to school and she ended up getting a divorce and we actually used to talk about that, that that was Somewhat common, and because the students would, they would come back to school and their minds would be opened up to all these different ideas and things. And sometimes that would change their perspectives and their interactions with their husbands. And sometimes they ended up getting divorces. Sometimes it was the husband's getting divorces or otherwise, or whatever. And it did sometimes. And maybe those things obviously, were already kind of there were already those divisions and things happening, but I think it was sometimes just because they had a different perspective on things. They had new goals and new new ideas that were coming in from the classroom. And the initial curriculum was very, it was very mind expanding anyway, because it was the Liberal Studies program called at the time that's what the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences now and trying to the one challenge that was really interesting was trying to figure out

how to kind of mark That program because it was the only program, but it didn't have any specific job within Liberal Studies, what does that mean? And how do I? That was a question I got all the time, what is this liberal studies? And what does that mean? And what can I do with it? So I was able to do a lot of research, and work with kind of local organizations and career development types of things to figure out, you know, many times it doesn't matter what your undergraduate degree is, you're going to improve your communication skills, you're going to improve your writing skills, and learn how to think critically and how to learn effectively. And that's going to be marketable to any employer. So that was really kind of a challenge sometimes to explain it to people but the students who who had the certain amount of work experience and basically just needed the bachelor's degree in order to kind of move on within their careers because so many of them and kind of come up against a wall where they couldn't get any further without that bachelor's degree, even though they were like, I remember one student who worked in a bank, and she couldn't get her promotion that she really needed to into the management position without the bachelor's degree. And she loved what she was doing here. She loved the classes. But she was also able then to move on in her career after after getting the degree. And I know some, there was one time when I think the same as anyway, he ended up going into, he was really interested in labor history, which was a major, of course, Mike Honey, taught a lot about labor history. And he was able to get a law degree after getting his bachelor's here. He got a degree in law and then began working with labor law, basically and so I know that was it was really a degree that actually ended up opening a lot of doors for people. And then, of course, the Rducation Program, the Nursing Program came on, which was also was very much more very different type of students that were drawn to that--mostly LPNs who wanted to become RNs. And then the Education Program came on for people to get their teaching credentials, which was also really important.

Joan Hua 35:25

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

And given the typical type of students that UW Tacoma was targeting at the beginning, a lot of nontraditional students, did you--? It sounds like you personally did believe in the value of liberal studies--

Christine Connerly 35:41

--Absolutely.

Joan Hua 35:41

--starting with that as the initial offering. Did you feel like there was a gap between the needs of the students who were going to school because they needed a degree to advance their careers and what UW Tacoma offered?

Christine Connerly 36:00

Well Personally, I mean, I had my degree in English literature undergraduate and and a minor in history, I did have a teaching credential because my mother said to me, You know, when I was halfway through school, she was an English teacher as well as my dad, you know, what are you going to do with your English degree? I'm like, Well, I guess I better teach because I wasn't sure what else to do. But I obviously, that was what I loved doing it. You know, I loved studying literature, I loved the writing and all of those things. And when I went into university, work, work administrative type work. In the admissions office, I found that that degree actually was fantastic. I remember being interviewed once for a jury for jury duty and they said, Well, do you ever feel bad that you don't use your degree and I said, I speak English every day. Because I do use you know, obviously an English degree turned out to be an excellent thing for me. And I was able to explain explain that to some of the students Coming in that, for me, I felt like learning to think critically learning to communicate effectively learning to write well, and was valuable in most jobs. But the challenge could be sometimes figuring out how to translate that, how to how to put that onto your resume, how to explain that to employers. And yes, the offerings were not, you know, they were not it was not a vocational school. We have vocational colleges in the area. And there wasn't really that Well, it wasn't the need at this point. It really was for people who had those other skills. But it was definitely It was definitely a tough sell sometimes. And there were some students who are just like, well, this isn't really working for me. But I certainly definitely, and continue to believe in that. What you get your degree and isn't as important unless you're going into something very, very specific, but usually that's a graduate program. That you have to do anyway. There are very few programs that are under you come out as an undergraduate necessarily with your ability to go out and do a specific job. I do--gosh, there was something I was trying to think of. Can't remember now. Oh well.

Joan Hua 38:19

I was also curious whether you were involved in the planning of these programs or, from your role at UW Tacoma, how you were involved in designing the curriculum and things like that.

Christine Connerly 38:34

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

Well, I certainly was not since I was not a faculty member. I was not. But I was able to express concerns based on trying to market things to people. And I was able to express because we were so small, I mean, they were just Gosh, I mean, there were fewer than 20 staff members and when I first staff me Faculty together. It was 13 staff people. And I think 13 found, yeah, yeah, 13 founding faculty. And then there were not very many more staff, I think maybe about the same number of staff, maybe fewer, I'm not sure. When we first started, and we used to, you know, we could all fit in one room easily. And so it was really easy to communicate much more. After coming from the University of Washington, Seattle, where the division between faculty and staff, it was very, you didn't really even as an academic advisor, you didn't necessarily involve you connect very much to faculty. And there was a huge division. It was, to me it felt very much like a class system. And faculty were and this has been true throughout my 30 plus years in higher education, that faculty are at the administrators and faculty are at the top and then staff and staff kind of all get lumped in together in many ways, but at University of Washington Tacoma, when we first opened, everybody got some input because we were so small and we went to potlucks at each other's houses where everybody would come and everybody knew everybody. It was a family type of situation. So I was able to at least have conversations with people that I wouldn't have ever been able to have at University of Washington, Seattle, and was able to express concerns or opinions about well, it might be helpful if students had more access to this because this is what I'm actually hearing from students at the community colleges, they wanted, you know, kind of different types of programs. And they definitely wanted, you know, they wanted Of course, I understand the desire to want the name of your career to be in your degree, in order to be able to translate that to an employer because having a degree and having being able to get a job or so you know, they're they're intimately Connect And so there was kind of, I would say, the faculty initially, were really adamant about wanting to help to teach people to learn and think critically, and to learn about French cinema and to learn all these different things, which were fantastic, amazing things, and we're definitely useful. But for the students, sometimes they didn't necessarily weren't able to always figure out how that was going to be useful to them in, in seeking employment. So for those that already had jobs and things like that, that they just needed the degree they were perfectly happy with that. But for those who were kind of like, a little more uncertain about what they wanted to do is more of a challenge. But yeah, we did have numerous discussions frequently constantly about making decisions about everything which classes I didn't I wasn't on the academic side, I was on the Student Services side And so we were making decisions more about things like transfer, how things would transfer, which was pretty well set out anyway. But we tried to be a little bit more flexible and have a little bit more leeway that we might have University of Washington and Seattle.

And we were having to make decisions about how to do financial aid and how to do all these different student services that were offered by numerous different departments with huge staffs at University of Washington, Seattle, and we had, you know, three people trying to like everything, I would do everything from like, change toilet paper in the bathroom to to go help the governor find his way to you know, the the dean's office or whatever it was like everything was, you know, there was no job too small, no job too big. It was all kind of happening all at the same

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

time. So it was very exciting. It was really And then trying to remember Judy Stevens-Long trying to start the student can help the students kind of figure out about how to start student government. And she was all this process oriented professor and she did a fantastic job of moderating this conversation with the students to try to figure out what they wanted and everything, but you know, what kind of organization that they want to be. And there was the resistance kind of thing about, well, how connected do we want to be to the University of Washington, Seattle, and how different do we want to be and there was this constant kind of push and pull between those two? Because some people really wanted it. Well, I want it to be like University of Washington, Seattle, and I want my degree not to say Tacoma on it because that might be lesser than, and there were others who felt really strongly that they wanted that Tacoma identity and they wanted the independent identity and and they wanted not to be I remember, I think it was Mike Allen who suggested that that mascot for UW Tacoma instead of being a husky should be a Malamute, which is basically just a different kind of Husky. But just kind of have a little bit different identity and, you know, and then the connection with the football and all those different things that are so you know, that are so ingrained in the Seattle campus, you know, what would Tacoma be like? So it was a very exciting time. Definitely a lot of change happening incredibly quickly, which was very exciting and energizing, but also exhausting, and intense. And they were constantly kind of new jobs or new opportunities opening up and there was a little bit of tension around that sometimes when people kind of like jockeying for position and figuring out should I should I try to like, go for this other job or should I stay here, you know what, you know. So there's just kind of a interesting mix of opportunities and challenges.

Joan Hua 45:03

Yeah. And so can you talk about the different roles you had? You mentioned the first one. You obviously have other roles at UW Tacoma, and how those have evolved?

Christine Connerly 45:15

Sure. Yeah, I started out the assistant director when there was no director but then he came on board. And I after I went out on maternity leave the halftime advising position that I had originally wanted opened up again, and I asked if I could come back in that role because I had a baby and I didn't want to work full time. And I had been working so hard as the assistant director, I was putting in 1012 hour days regularly and I really didn't want to have to do that with the baby. So I came back as I have time advisor and That was great. I loved it. I worked. It was evenings, all the classes were in the evening, there were no daytime classes whatsoever. And I worked four days a week, 20 hours. And it was a perfect job to have. Well, being a new mom. And I my commute was I lived 15 minutes away. On the north end to Tacoma, I lived right near ups actually. So it was actually just really lovely. And then I began to work more hours as the campus began to grow. And I ended up you know, going to three quarter time and then pretty much full time and I and then I ended up becoming the assistant director for advising because I knew more about advising from UW Seattle campus and most of the other staff. I ended up supervising the financial aid advisor and then I think there were two two other advisors in Student Services and then we had one of those Terry's assignment to his Terri Herman cemetery assignments and who's still working here on campus.

And then, also the academic advisors from the department's. They didn't really have academic advisors, but they had--I can't remember now what they were called--coordinators, I think they were program coordinators, who did all ended up doing a lot of advising. And so I made sure that they kind of had information about academic advising skills and things like that. We put together handbooks and things like that. So I, we would have different meetings for kind of talking about advising faculty. I found over the many years that I've worked in higher education, some faculty are excellent academic advisors, but most of them are really good at talking about kind of the big picture or talking about They're specific professional pathways and things like that, but maybe not as good at the technical aspects of how to navigate the bureaucracy. Like how do you actually make sure that you've met all these requirements? How do you make sure that you've turned in the correct paperwork at the right time and, you know, kind of nuts and bolts, things that are pretty important if you really actually want to graduate on time. And so, I, at the University of Washington, Seattle, they had a professional advising system. And I really think that's, I still think that that's probably the one of the better ways to go but have faculty advising available for, for people to kind of get the bigger picture and to get the kind of more understanding of specific career paths within that discipline. But in terms of the actual nuts and bolts and making sure everything's done on time, and to do it in a way that's compassionate and supportive of the students, and to understand that it's about meeting their needs, and Not to try to push them in a specific direction. But to help them figure out how what is offered at that campus going to meet their specific individual goals is extremely important. So that was one of the things that I really worked hard to try to like help establish it at UW Tacoma. And then there was Steve Smith ended up being put in, ended up moving into a different role on campus, and his position opened up and I decided to apply for it, which was the so the associate was not the Director of Student Affairs. So I applied for it, but it was determined at that time. For some reason that person they offered the job to didn't accept it, but they decided I wasn't ready for some reason. So they asked me to be the Associate Director of Student Affairs, but there was no director which meant that I was going to have to train whoever the director was going to Be and I did that for about six months and there was no director for maybe five months, I think and there was and I was supervising everyone in student affairs at 16 staff and that meant financial aid registration, admissions, Career Center or career counseling, that disability support services, counseling, everything. It was all represented by these 16 different staff. And it was exhausting. I had by that time had a second child and it was a little bit intense. I would wake up in the middle of the night and make 60 item to do lists and when I'd gone to peel you I'd been a tutor as an undergraduate there and my supervisor there it always joke that when she retired, I would get her job as the director of the Student Learning Center, the academic Assistance Center out at PSU center. During that time, when I was the associate director, she called me and told me she was retiring. And I said, I'm applying because I really needed to not do that. And it was a, it was a great learning opportunity. And I don't regret doing it. But it was very challenging. And it was just part of the I think the nature of the growth of the campus. And interestingly, there were quite a few, most of the people and at that time were in the positions of authority, the deans and everything, were all women. And honestly, I think that they wanted to help a man and in the student, they did end up hiring a man actually in that position, which is kind of ironic, because

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

usually, it's the other way around that they you know, it's unusual to have that many women in leadership positions. But, you know, and for whatever reason, they they felt that that was a better role for me at that time. But for me, Personally, it was a little too much for me.

And I loved being here during the first eight years of the campus. And it was a very personally intense time for me it was probably one of the it was the most personally intense times for me in my life because during that time, I bought two we, my ex husband and I bought two homes. I had we had two children, I lost my mother, she died right before I had my second child. My father-in-law passed away, and it was just--and then my marriage split up shortly after, after I left UW Tacoma. So my time here was incredibly personally and professionally intense, the most intense time in my life. So all of that was kind of connected with this, the growth of this campus and I felt I think somehow being pregnant When the campus opened, made me feel almost like the campus was sort of like my baby too. And I felt very personally connected to it in a way that was probably maybe even not as healthy as it could have been. I loved having the role of being involved with the arts and our development of the arts and the Arts Commission. And I'll talk about that a little bit more later. But But overall, it was it was an experience that I wouldn't have traded for anything and it prepared me I could probably have done any job at any campus after that. But definitely having so many different roles in such a short amount of time when so many other things were going on in my life was intense. But it I remember the best thing about the campus was the students always and I always feel that way about every campus I've worked at.

One of the reasons I decided, I think, to leave after becoming an associate director was that I wasn't able to work with students much anymore. I was too involved with supervision of so many other areas. And I was getting more and more where I was going to a lot of meetings. And I was doing performance evaluations. And I was doing super dealing with supervision issues and some challenging ones, human personnel, human resources, personnel issues, but I was not interacting with the students. And that was what I really loved doing and that's what I really wanted to do. And so that's why when I went to peel you I was I loved it because I was once again working with the students. And that was actually I ended up working at Chico State for 17 years and I ended up what I ended up doing was being in charge of their student learning center and that was still the best kind of work because I got to combine. tutoring is very much like advising And yet it involves a lot more academic and teaching, aspects that I really enjoyed.

But at UW Tacoma it was a heady, exhilarating, exhausting experience of trying to navigate. You know, even what departments we needed even, you know, it would all of a sudden be, oh my gosh, we don't have anybody to deal with how are you going to evaluate veterans experience because there were certain there was like an ace guide where you had to like determine based on someone's dd 214 there, which is their exit papers from the military, what credits they were going to get, what, how many units they were going to get. There was nobody to do that. We had to do all kinds of very bizarre kinds of things. And sometimes we'd have to like invent jobs. Because there was nobody to do it. And we suddenly realized that we needed, you know, needed something and oh, we better make up a job for that. But it was it was. And then the boys, the budget issues were always a concern. Because anytime you're dealing with

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

state budgets in a state system, whatever the economy happens to be doing impacts and people's decisions. And then the public will there will be a lot of pushback about they're wasting money and they're spending too much money on this and what do we need that for and so that that was always kind of an interesting thing, too, is the public versus kind of private institution.

Joan Hua 56:47

And when I look at the news, some news clippings from that time, often that's tied to--like the argument for or against it--is tide to student enrollment, and it didn't meet the target in the first two years, or it was kind of ongoing. And you did recruitment also. So I'm curious about the work there and what the challenges were with meeting targets, but also there were specific conversations about representation or diversity of student body or where you were recruiting.

Christine Connerly 57:30

Yes. And that was a huge, huge issue. Because we were working primarily with the community colleges because people had to have their first two years done. And the we worked very closely with Tacoma Community College, I worked. I made connections with the different advisors and counselors at the community colleges, especially to come with Community College below. So South Puget Sound On Pierce College, and we would definitely do a lot of days where we would have advising out there I remember setting up you know, tables and we promote that we were going to be there a certain days to try to get people to, to come and meet with us so that we could get sometimes people wouldn't didn't want to, there were lots of people that would come here to meet with us. But a lot of times, you know, you need to go out and meet people where they are. And we also tried to work with the Urban League and and I think one of the some of the involvement with the arts too, because as I mentioned, the Arts Commission was really working on trying to honor the cultural heritage of the of the city. And so they are through getting involved the Bill Richardson, who was the dean, the first Dean ended up asking me to be the liaison for the campus with the Tacoma Arts Commission because I was also with the Seattle Arts Commission, Seattle University of Washington, Seattle campus Arts Commission. I was the liaison with the public art, which is why I ended up collecting all the feedback on Buster Simpson's project. And through that, I ended up making a lot of connections that actually were really helpful in terms of meeting different areas of the community and finding out what what people you know how to kind of reach out to different groups and different community areas. And that was there was also a nine-day cultural institute, a cultural pluralism institute, at Evergreen State College; that was in 1993. Yeah. And that actually have quite a few faculty. He went and I went. And they really emphasize the importance of being actually having meaningful connections with the community instead of just coming out and saying, Oh come to our campus, but not really understanding the context like Native American students wouldn't really want to come are wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable coming to a campus if they didn't feel that it was going to be really supportive of their community. Obviously, given the history of boarding schools and forced cultural simulate assimilation, some of those communities are really reluctant to send their, their students to college, because they feel uncomfortable, it's going to be taking them away from their communities. So I think that, that experience of going to that Institute really emphasize these specifically talked about Asian history, Native American, Latino

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

and Black history, and talking about the importance of trying to really connect and infuse cultural pluralism into the curriculum as a way to provide a more welcoming environment for students, and to help them understand to help see they're the representation of their culture within the context of the curriculum. So it was there was a huge and for me as a kind of thinking about outreach and things like that. I really felt that the with the importance of the campus being a resource for the community and the community being a resource for the campus. And having that kind of mutually beneficial relationship was fundamental to trying to recruit students rather than just saying, well, this is this is great. We are you can, you just can come here and accept who we are. But we, we don't really care where you're coming from, we don't really care about your culture or whatever. It was really important to have a meaningful connection. And a lot of the faculty here, initial faculty really did do some tried to have incorporate community service type projects or projects where the students were actively involved in collecting data or information that were and working within the community or doing kind of internship types of projects and things like that. So I think some of the faculty were really, very open to that and really encouraging of that. But yeah, we did we worked with There was also a the Evergreen State campus had a little Tacoma campus presence and there was, I know they were they were not so sure about how this was going to impact that they felt. They saw it as maybe not being because the Evergreen State College campus here was really mostly for black strip. I mean, it was really kind of their outreach. And their emphasis was really focused on on the urban working with the Urban League and really working closely with Black students. And I think that was there was some tension there initially. That I don't know where it went from there, but, but I know that it was a challenge. And the initial student I would say the student population wasn't particularly diverse to begin with. It was a little bit but not not yet evergreen, but also at Tacoma, at the UW Tacoma, initially, the campus I don't think the diversity even close to represent the diversity within Tacoma of the student population from what I remember. It was primarily white, older white students initially, but it be you know, obviously that seems to have changed. Which makes me really happy to see. And I think it mainly had to do with the fact because it was upper division only. And it was kind of where students were at in terms of like the students returning to school at that time. I think that and you know, I think it was just, once again, it was like kind of that newness of things. So it was like, Well, this was not really being sure of what this campus really was about or what it meant or what it could do. And I think that even though I fundamentally believed in the Liberal Studies degree, I think a lot of people weren't really sure what that was. And they weren't really sure what they could do with it. And it was kind of--people weren't exactly, didn't really know how they were going to use that degree to further their career goals.

Joan Hua 1:04:59

Do you want to talk more about your role with the Tacoma Arts Commission?

Christine Connerly 1:05:04

Sure, I would love to. Yeah. So, because the UW Seattle campus have the percent for arts and that was something that the Washington State had an Arts Commission and there was a 1% of construction funds were going to be used for public art with any projects and the University of

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

Washington had its own Arts Commission to determine anytime something was built, how the money would be spent.

And there was quite a win. With the campus being built here. There was some of that money was going to be used for public art. And so they campus I think it was the campus art commission and I think, in Seattle, and then also the architects may have been involved somewhat But in picking kind of an artist to work with them. And I think actually I don't think the architects were involved because Buster Simpson eventually was chosen. And he had a lot of really innovative ideas. He has done a lot of kind of very interesting projects. Like river Rolands was one thing that he does, where he puts these. I can't remember the line or something. But he put something in like polluted rivers that that slowly dissolved, but they also helped clean up the pollution out of a river. And so he so his idea is to have something really firmly founded and grounded in in a place and the context and the history of that place and to really honor that. And I think that's why they wanted to pick him because he had kind of an industrial gritty, he's not he wasn't averse to having something be a little bit industrial gritty or that kind of thing. And so he had all these ideas of how To incorporate the local history and create a campus is kind of an environmental learning opportunity in every aspect of it like he had idea of having these like rain drums that would wear the rain would fall off the buildings and create these you know, musical kinds of things but also collect rainwater that could then be used to water the plants and you'd have native plants and you know, we had all these different ideas that were really very creative and very fantastic. But what the what they ended up some of the people that were making decisions that time decided with the, the like the words on having words on the buildings, because these buildings originally were warehouse buildings, and they had huge words on them like warehouse storage, Harman, whatever, you know the names of the buildings, the names of the mattress factory, you know, and the buildings in old pictures that you look at. Were always covered with big signage and pink words. painted on the buildings. So his idea was, well, I'm going to, you know, he, he had this idea of Well, I'm going to go on and put up these words on the parapet of the Garretson Woodruff & Pratt building, and it would say, from one angle, it would say, knowledge and then from another angle or you know, kind of superimpose, you'd see the word storage, because that was originally with a word that was on the building. And that idea was popular with some, but most of the people most of the faculty and staff on campus thought it was a horrible idea. They hated the idea of thinking of a university as a knowledge storage area because they felt that was too static and they didn't like they thought it was it didn't really make sense within the context of a dynamic you know, university that was always changing and ideas were free flow of information, not storing in some dusty warehouse a bunch of knowledge. That's not really what a university is about. So he you know, Buster Simpson first was like kind of resistant to this pushback and it and there were quite a few very vehemently expressed ideas about well, that's good. That's gonna make us a laughingstock if we have these words on the building and just kind of people are going to get the wrong idea about the campus and they're not going to it's doesn't make any sense and why do we want to you know, celebrate the grittiness of this you know the history anyway we want to have something new and all this and yeah, we don't want to because Buster Simpsons very against having like pretty suffocation and not having things to be to wants to create, you know, have some context within things. And

some people didn't care for that. So anyway, I ended up being in charge of collecting people's feedback and ended up getting quite a collection of different emails of people in it. This was back in the day when it was you know, there was no An ad or social media or anything that it would basically would have gone viral on social media. But people were responding to these kind of all announced where everybody was in on the discussion and coming up with these long descriptions of how embarrassing that would be to have these ideas have these words on the building. So eventually what he did was he expanded. And this was this was working with so I had to represent all of these ideas and go back to the Arts Commission at the UW Seattle and also communicate with bester Simpson about the feedback. And he ended up expanding it to creating to having more words and to have more context. So it's with this idea, you see idea gather.

And then wisdom if the lights right and then knowledge, storage, labor, and universe UW Tacoma so you've got depending on it as you walk down the street and then of course the plaques in the sidewalk. I remember having a slight little bit of input into some of it because I was he was talking about the idea of the word labor because he was going back and forth whether you wanted to use the word labor or the labor or the word commence, because of commencement, commencement, they come in Smith's company or whatever. So he decided on labor and he goes, Well, labor is good because then you also have the history of labor and people's work and I said, Yeah, I could also refer to labor's and women giving birth to children and he's like, Yeah, that's good. He ended up putting different quotes on the plaque referring you know that we can see the word labor and the plaque has something about a woman in labor and something about the late our labor's we I think Lewis and Clark or something wrote into commencement they wrote and like and then there's something quote about labor being the Victor Hugo quote about the labors of reverie or whatever and knowledge anyway, yeah. Get up doing a brass rubbing of the plaque and he gave it and gave it to me. So that was I have that on my wall at home. So it's definitely a part of my life, that specific word. And of course, it was meaningful to me because as I mentioned, I had two children while I was here. So the idea of labor and giving birth was important. And so my connection with the bat art piece ended up and being involved with being the liaison with the Seattle Arts Commission. Bill Richardson encouraged me to apply to be on the Tacoma Arts Commission to be the liaison with the Tacoma art scene and UW Tacoma, which was very important given that arts was being used as one of the major ways to provide a renaissance in Tacoma. It seemed to make a lot of sense for the UW to be very heavily involved with that. So I did get on the Tacoma Arts Commission. I think I was there for I think, two and a half years. I think I was the chair for one year. And it was definitely once again a heck of a lot happening in Tacoma in the art scene. And the focus we really had was on arts and education. And working with the schools. We also created a, there was a campus committee called action for art. And we were able to kind of be the we were we met and we advocated for having arts an arts program on the campus having arts curriculum. And we also did like an Asian Autumn in the arts thing because they're the Seattle we tried to make sure that there would be classes that would be relevant to we encourage to, to try to have classes that would be relevant or to have corporate things that were happening at the Tacoma Art Museum into the curriculum somewhat. So the Tacoma Art Museum was doing an Asian art

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

exhibit, and so we ended up having a display of Asian textiles in the library. And I guess it was in the Perkins Building, the library was in the Perkins Building. So we had some displays of that. And we had a tour to the Seattle Asian Art Museum, Sam Parker led, which was really wonderful. He did an incredible job. And then Mike Kalton, who also taught Asian religious studies, and we went to the Buddhist temple, a Korean Buddhist temple and Tacoma and then did a tour of the Tacoma Art Museum exhibit. And so anyway, we did all these different things.

And it was also a really a great opportunity to make a lot of different connections through the Tacoma art scene. We would have arts day where we would go to Olympia and meet with Different legislators to advocate for arts and education and access to art and public art. And as I mentioned, there was a lot of pushback during that time on about public art. And there's always there's always a thing about, "Well, why should we spend tax dollars?" And that kind of thing. But I think in Tacoma, it was pretty evident and pretty obvious that between education, the Washington State History Museum, the Tacoma Art Museum was also moving, with the push for the Museum of Glass, Dale Chihuly's hometown of Tacoma, and the Theater District. All these things were really having this huge impact on, you know, revitalizing the downtown and, and it was a it was an absolutely incredible and amazing time to be involved in that art scene. There were some really interesting things that were done. I mentioned earlier the neon wars that happened with the Tacoma the Tacoma dome and one of the things that happened during that time, I think it was 1992 or something. Or 91. They, Dale Chihuly installed this big neon and ice exhibit at the basic was like the hockey hockey ice that was in the Tacoma dome. He else installed all these like big neon tubes and stuff that they would reflect and it was like, it was huge. There were like lines down the block trying to get into this thing and it was kind of really amusing and ironic that that neon art ended up being this huge, big thing and you know, that became very popular and supported you know in at the Tacoma dome after it ended up earlier being something that actually killed the percent for arts program in the city. But yeah, there was that there was also a sound artist, there was a sound artist named Dan San in Tacoma and he would bring all these really interesting artists from all over the world that would come in and do these very cool projects he had had and I don't know if it's still there, but there was in the garrison Woodward prep building, there was one it wasn't in that building was in a different building. He had had installed kind of sound art piece in there. But he invited somebody who strung piano wire throughout one of the warehouses on the waterfront. And it was this hold old wooden warehouse and so he strung piano wire throughout the entire building and then played the building and went around kind of running his hand along and making different sounds through this piano wire which would reverberate through this huge empty wooden building. And I remember taking my lovely son who was like Less than two.

It was it was dark. And there was this like kind of weird sounds coming out of the building. And he was just kind of like really?

Hopefully thought it was an interesting thing. He didn't seem scared or anything, which is good. But yeah, there was a lot of really exciting innovation. And it was my ex-husband and I were both very, you know, involved with that--historic preservation in the city and things like that. He

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

ended up being on the historic preservation committee in Tacoma. So, it definitely was kind of personally for me really interesting. And I really loved the fact that there was a lot of real respect and attention paid to like the cultural heritage of the area. There was also a lot of honoring of the historic buildings and kind of recognizing Tacoma as this unique place. has a unique history that's not Seattle, but is its own in its own right. Not something that's trying to be better than or, you know, it was basically I felt like it was kind of coming into its own in a way that was really satisfying to me as somebody who loves to come and identified so much with with this town. And now coming back, you know, here it is almost 30 years later, very easy. And I'm like, Oh, my son's gonna be 30 this year.

Recognizing that, you know, to seeing how much the town has changed, seeing how much to comma downtown is now this totally different place. I love staying at the temple to see historic preservation, you know, in action and seeing I don't think that without the University of Washington Tacoma and some of the other things that have happened here with the arts that that would have even happened I that building probably would have been torn down. So to see the, the honoring of this history of this area, and to see that Tacoma has a pretty vibrant art scene in many ways, especially compared to lead me in the 1980s. It was so deserted and I remember one of the staff people that we hired early on said, him the first time I drove through downtown Tacoma, I thought maybe a bomb had gone off, and it killed all the people but left all the buildings because it was so depressing. There was no one down here. It was just so awful. And now there's hotels, and there's art museums, and there's all these different things happening, and the Museum of Glass is known. I remember going to a lot of the meetings, of planning of the Museum of Glass, and there, once again, all these different ideas and opinions and things. And it was a really exciting, fantastic time and it definitely has impacted this community significantly. My ex-husband who is semi-retired, but he's still works, comes in and works and does special projects. But he got to work on the renovation of Stadium High School, and has worked on a lot of different projects in downtown Tacoma that make him really happy as a person who loves historic preservation.

Joan Hua 1:21:25

So, as we're kind of getting to the end of the interview, I'm thinking of how you at the beginning said when you were at UW Seattle, you thought maybe you were reluctant to apply to the job at UW Tacoma because it would be too chaotic. So now, looking back at that, and maybe what you had hoped UW Tacoma would become when you did decide to take the job, has UW Tacoma stayed true to what you had hoped it would become? Or what do you think of the outcome there?

Christine Connerly 1:22:05

Well, a couple of years ago, probably about three years ago now I came to a conference, a writing conference that was held kind of sponsored through university of Puget Sound for writing tutors. And I came and stayed at the Hotel Murano. And one of the workshops was actually done on campus here at UW Tacoma. And it was about kind of they write how they involved it was the writing and quantum the quantum center or whatever they did the kind of Yeah, the

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

learning and the Teaching and Learning Center and how they kind of integrated the the tutoring for writing and math. And actually, I was so I went to that workshop because I was just like, wow, it's UW Tacoma and seeing the growth of it and I remember when the Writing Center first open I actually applied to be the Writing Center Director because I loved you know, tutoring centers, which ended up being the majority of my career in the end.

But when I got here and saw what was happening, and I heard the staff there and, and Faculty Director talking about what their mission was and their goal and what they were trying to do. I thought this is exactly what I had hoped the campus would become. And I saw the students working there, the staff was diverse, the students were diverse, and I could see their needs getting met in a way that just felt like their whole mission was really definitely in line with what Tacoma should be in terms of, you know, honoring the cultural heritage of the different people within Tacoma. To really be supportive of helping people achieve their academic, personal and professional goals, and to also give them concrete skills that are going to help them, you know, go out in the world and make a difference, which is really what I think University is about is trying to help people make a difference in the world, whether it's through their career through there, but I think a good university education makes a difference beyond just what job you do, but also how you interact within that job, and how you work within your community and your family as an informed citizen. And I was I wandered around the campus a little bit and was really impressed with the way things have gone. I think, I know there's some controversy about admitting freshmen and things like that. And but I think in the long run that that was inevitable that that was going to happen. I just don't think it could have Developed fully as a campus without having the the four year pathway beyond option for some people as well. And I think, from what I've seen, I think the campus has done an excellent job of fulfilling this. Its mission. And I have a feeling though it's probably still got some, you know, it's still growing, it's still changing. And I'm sure that there's still some chaotic aspects to it. And because I think anytime you have a dynamic institution like that, that's going to be the case. And yes, it was a very personally intense time and yes, it was chaotic at the beginning, but I don't regret any moment. I don't regret anything that I learned here. I loved my interaction with the students. I'm still in touch with some of the students one of the students that I was an advisor to ended up becoming an advisor at Chico's I mean, sorry, at UW Tacoma. She worked in the social work think department Anyway, she ended up advising and she ended up retiring from this job. She was actually older than I was anyway. But she ended up retiring from UW Tacoma as an advisor. And one of the most meaningful things to the student ever said to me was when he introduced me to his family and said, Yeah, she really humanized the bureaucracy. And that was really meaningful to me because and I hope that that UW Tacoma has continued to be a place that's really welcoming and humanizing. And, and it doesn't, it seems to me like there's a little bit there's less of an attitude of superiority than maybe at the UW Seattle campus where I think students feel sometimes when intimidated or looked down on sometimes, potentially. But I think here hopefully, that it still has the more welcoming, open, you know, really working with students, where they come and then trying to help them achieve what they want while they're here.

University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

Joan Hua 1:27:05

Great. Thank you. So I don't have any more questions. But before I turn off the recorder, is there something we haven't talked about that you wanted to add or other things that came to mind?

Christine Connerly 1:27:19

I've talked about all kinds of things. And I don't think so. I think, overall, I had been, like I said, really impressed with what's happened here. And obviously, I've been away now for 20 years. I moved away. What happened to me after I left here--like I said, my name is different, but also my life is very different. Because after I left UW Tacoma, I worked at PLU for three years, and I loved it there. But as I mentioned, my marriage didn't work out. We're still on very good terms and good friends, but it didn't work out as a marriage. And I ended up meeting someone who worked at Chico State. And because I had worked in everything--I've done everything in Student Services and in way or another because UW Tacoma was so small; I did everything--I got a job at Chico State working in financial aid to start with, and then went back to my first love, which was academic assistance or tutoring. And I ended up becoming the director of the Student Learning Center there and had a 17-year career of doing something I absolutely loved. But I know that the job I had here at UW Tacoma informed every single thing that I've done in my career since then, and it's also helped me, remind me that I never wanted to become an administrator to the point where I would lose contact with students because this satisfaction of working with students and helping them figure out how to reach their potential and become the people that they want to become personally and professionally is the most meaningful thing that you can do at a university. And it's something that I had the privilege to be able to do here at UW Tacoma and carry forward in the other jobs that I've done since then.

Joan Hua 1:29:20

All right. Thank you.