

## University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

**Narrator:** Chana Lawson  
**Date:** 1/22/2020  
**Interviewed by:** Joan Hua  
**Place:** Tacoma, Washington

**Joan Hua 0:00**

**This is Joan Hua with the UW Tacoma or History Project. I'm interviewing Chana Lawson. It's January 22, 2020. And we're in the Snoqualmie building at UW Tacoma campus. So Chana, can you first state your name, and your major at UW Tacoma and the year you graduated?**

Chana Lawson 0:23

My name is Chana Lawson. And my major was Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, with the emphasis in self and society concentration. I had a double minor in Nonprofit Management and also Education. And I graduated in 2007.

**Joan Hua 0:45**

**Right. And can you start by telling me a bit about your family background before you came to UW Tacoma for college.**

Chana Lawson 0:55

So before I came here for college, so many years back, my background was that I was a military wife, but I also worked in insurance. I worked for Geico insurance and then eventually wound up working for the airline industry because I felt like that would be better since being a military wife we got kind of moved around a bit. I wanted to be able to transfer but also travel because I love to travel. My major started out as business but then I switched over later because I found that the business major was more restrictive, I felt, more like check the boxes type of education and learning. But if I did the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences I could learn some more complex things and have more like an open box instead of feeling kind of like, "Oh, I got to work in this corporate world with the, inside a box." I can think outside the box if I'm doing Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, but still apply the business to it.

**Joan Hua 2:01**

**And what made you choose UW Tacoma?**

Chana Lawson 2:05

UW Tacoma for its location because it was close to me. I was living in Puyallup. So Puyallup is a little ways away but not that far. I did not want to go all the way to Seattle. I didn't want to commute. And I worked at the airport and also at the reservations office, which was located near the airport. So if I could go to school near somewhere where I could get back and forth to work easily, that's how I felt would be the best thing. I didn't want to go all the way to Seattle.

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But also the fact that Tacoma is a city. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and that's what I preferred, was to be where the city was because that's where the heartbeat of community is, I feel, mostly, for me. So UW Tacoma seemed to fit perfectly. I was at Pierce College for a while, and they had a program where you could transfer from Pierce College into UW Tacoma or you could go other places, but I felt that UW Tacoma fit more of what I wanted to do.

**Joan Hua 3:05**

**And so, but you were already working. You had a career before you decided to attend college here.**

Chana Lawson 3:15

Yes. So in the airline industry, I was doing a number of things—some things around security. I used to identify fraudulent ticket bookings and things like that. So I was a reservations agent, but I also worked as a customer service agent, and I also worked on the ramp. I'd pretty much tried everything at the airlines, did different things and was chosen for different projects. And so, but coming here ... there was 9/11. That's what changed the trajectory of everything.

So I always wanted to finish my degree. I actually went to college at the age of 17. I graduated early and attended a community college in California. So I had that experience being young in college, but then I wound up married within a few years. And he went into the military. So that kind of changed my pathway. We had to make a decision because we were living in Europe. So, so that kind of changed the path. But 9/11 is really what made me say, "Okay, I need to hurry up and finish what I wanted to do," which was to finish my degree, is what I promised my mother. My mother had her degree in education. And so I was like, I need to do this. So 9/11 made people lose their jobs at the airlines. I was protected because of all of the different experience that I had. I could move—I was union, but I could move from one union contract to another, because I had seniority in multiple things with the airlines. So I never lost my job. I never got laid off, but I saw other people getting laid off, and when I looked at the business plan that the airlines had, I could see the writing on the wall after 9/11 happened. So I decided I would go ahead and finish out my four-year degree, then finish my master's, and then move on from the airlines. I did try to go into management with the airlines. But they said that I would have to move to Atlanta at the time because of a merger that was happening between Northwest Airlines and Delta Airlines. And so I didn't want to move to Atlanta because my children were here in school. So I decided to just go ahead and leave and decided to work for a nonprofit organization called Northwest Leadership Foundation, and I stayed there for a while.

**Joan Hua 5:40**

**But it sounds like from your mother's influence, and maybe some other factors, pursuing academics and in higher education was important to you.**

Chana Lawson 5:53

Yes, it was. It wasn't that you weren't gonna do it. You had to do it. So I grew up knowing that you have to get your education. And with the background that I come from, being African

American—I have a lot of multi-racial ethnicities in my background, but African American is what I identify as—and that is what stood out to me. It was that people who were held back from education, it just ... the things they went through so that we could have an education, have equal opportunities in America. I just, there's no not going to school and finishing your education. Even if I didn't go to college, I still would have picked up a trade. One of the things that I did was aeronautics. Because I was an Air Force ROTC. I was able to learn a lot about airplanes and things like that. So before 9/11 happened, I was actually supposed to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and I was looking at getting a certification. And what my main goal was was to be able to manage and lead people but also be at the helm of securing aircraft, making sure that those aircraft are, you know, stable and safe in the air. So being an inspector, investigating and things like that, is what I was really interested in. But 9/11 changed that because the amount of money and funding for that changed. The airline was going to pay for me to do that. But then they said the money was gone after 9/11 because of everything that had happened. So then I said, "Okay, let me go finish my business degree because that's where I started." And I looked at the business program here. So that's how I wound up at UW Tacoma, is really just trying to finish up my education and decided to go a different path.

**Joan Hua 7:45**

**So by the time you got to UW Tacoma, you already had all these experiences and some experience at other universities. What were your first impressions of UW Tacoma, and what was different?**

Chana Lawson 7:58

It was a smaller college. What was different? I felt like that there was a lot of community. But there were some changes that needed to be made, I felt. Being a student, there were people who were ... because when I first came to the campus, it was a commuter campus, where people who were juniors and seniors, they would come here, they would transfer in from other colleges. But the moment that we were here, they were working on bringing the first freshman class to UW Tacoma. So that changed a lot of things. So I saw the opportunity at UW Tacoma, is that it would grow and become better and better. And what could I do to contribute to that and make it a better space?

I had a chance in working with the student organization, the Black Student Union here, I had a chance to mentor the new freshmen coming in into leadership roles. And that was amazing. And the college expanded from there, but being at a young, I guess, kind of a young college, it definitely was different. There were some things that we needed as far as students, and even being a commuter student who worked and then had to be here. There were just some unique things about the campus that allowed us to come and go. But at the same time, I felt like we needed to build more community on the campus because some people were not engaged because they would think, you know, "I just come. I go to work. I come; I go to work." So I don't know, being here, I did like the class sizes because you got a lot of attention from the professors. It was a smaller classroom than what I was used to. What I felt was that the scholarly part of it, where you could actually—one of the classes that I took, which was in ethnic

and gender studies, was about women and gender and labor; it was with Dr. Ignacio. And that really scratched the surface of, "Wow."

Every university should be thinking this way. But some of the professor's really, really inspired me. Dr. Honey was one of them. Dr. Ignacio was another. So the fact that there was some history about the women's suffrage movement. Immigrants. Learning about immigrants and education on immigrants. So just the wide view of what we had here really kept me solidly here. Now, some students would ask me, "Why do you care? You just come, go to work, you know. Do your stuff and then go to work." But I was like, "No. I mean, we're like here for a couple years. So why not transform it to what we really want it to be? And really speak up about what needs to happen here, or contribute to the place?"

So some of those same students that I was in class with that said, "Why do you care?" You know, they're now active because we stay in touch, and I have created an alumni group, and we meet up and do social activities, and we're able to engage with students. I was able to kind of head up a, with the BSU, a Back Alumni Weekend for the first time here. So those are some of the things that I still like about UW Tacoma—is that there's the opportunity to say, What do we want this space to be? What do we want it to—you know, how can we bring community in, which includes alumni, community, and have them engage with the students but also see the university as a vital resource? So even doing this interview with the project. I think it is pretty awesome that you guys are getting, you know, charting the history and kind of talking to people who have been here and things like that. But that would be an opportunity for students to kind of access, or even the community the access, some of these interviews and some of the information. So I feel like it's an open—almost like a, it's like an open opportunity for the community, not just people that work here and students. It's like an open—you can contribute to something here, whether you're a student here. But it also opens up the opportunity for people who maybe didn't think about being a student to be a student. Because sometimes you can learn and you may want to go get the job, but if you're a lifelong learner, or you're learning something outside of, even if it's just going to one of the events on the campus, you're learning something and connecting with people. So that's what I love about UW Tacoma.

**Joan Hua 12:46**

**And so you mentioned already that soon after you started, that was when UW Tacoma first started to accept freshmen and sophomores, instead of just upper division. What was the significance of that? And how did that influence your learning environment?**

**Chana Lawson 13:14**

Well, it definitely changed a lot of things because now you have younger students coming into the classroom. Now, with the freshmen, they kept them close knit together, though. We kept saying, "How come we don't see the freshmen? Where are they at?" And they would say, "Well, we keep them in the same classrooms together because they're cohorts, and we want them to see the same face every time because that'll help them stay in school and, you know, when you see other people like you. So that was one of the things that we'd actually seek them out and

was able to get them engaged in—so the student organization really balanced out, like being able to have different ages in the room. That's what education is all about, is when you can get in a space: somebody doesn't look like you; they're not your same age. You know? Then you get a lot of feedback and learning from just being around different people. Talking to people that come from a different culture or even if, for student org, they have commonalities. There's also differences. So the Black Student Union, there wasn't an African Student Association at that time. There wasn't an African—so every brown person that was under that umbrella would come into the BSU. But also the BSU was very multicultural. There have been some white officers in the past and things like that. So being able to, to me it was very important. Because of having the young people there, the younger people there, it really opened up a lot. And I think one time we even put together a hip-hop class that went for a whole quarter or a whole semester, because we wanted to bring the younger people in to mix with the older people. And so, and I was young at that time. I had to be 32. So that's young to me. We actually danced and still have some newspaper clippings, but we were able to break down some walls and stuff like that. So to me, it was pretty significant having them on campus. For the first time there was talk about bringing fraternities and sororities on campus because of the freshmen coming in. So they were saying, "Okay, now that we have students that will stay here for all four years, we should be providing the opportunity for them to be with a Greek organization, which opens up scholarship opportunities, leadership opportunities, you know, job opportunities, things like that." So it was pretty significant. We saw quite a few different things come from it as far as programming and stuff like that, positions where young people could get into position. I remember there was a math and science—it was like a STEM program for the summer. And they actually had hired some of the younger people to come in, and I can't remember what their titles were, but to work with high school and middle school students in that program. So to me, it definitely changed. To me it made it look more like community because in the community you see young people, old people; you see the whole whole variety. And so it made it more community to me.

**Joan Hua 16:15**

**And you were talking about the different age groups. So when you started, were a lot of your classmates kind of your age or were they more like in their 20s, kind of like, traditional junior or senior, college student age?**

**Chana Lawson 16:35**

They were in their 20s. I think a lot of it depends on the program because I was doing so many complex, like with the double minor. So with the double minor, the Education program, I think I saw older students. But in the nonprofit management courses and some of the social work courses, there were younger people like 26, 25. There was even, I think, 21. There was a couple of students who were Running Start. So they were very, very young. But there still was a good mix of people too. There were some people that were older than me. There were a few people that were older than me that would be considered elders, like 60, and stuff like that. So I would say it was a good mix. But there was a younger crowd, maybe between 25 and 28, in the classrooms.

**Joan Hua 17:25**

**And you were working at the same time as you were going to school?**

Chana Lawson 17:30

Yes, I worked at Northwest Airlines. At some point, when I got ready for my master's, I had to change over and go to part time, because it was, you know, I had to really put in some work. But what the airlines allowed me to do was to be flexible. Sometimes I would show up to work, and sometimes I wouldn't, but I would have somebody cover me. Like I would say, "Can you work my Friday because I need to be ...? I need more time in class; can you work half my shift?" So I was able to do that. That's why I've stayed with the airlines 13 years: because they gave me a lot of flexibility to where I didn't necessarily have to be there from a nine to five, I could work from eight to two in the morning or have other people work my shift and not come to work at all for a whole week. So that's what I loved about it. And it allowed me to focus and still be a good student.

**Joan Hua 18:22**

**And then after you graduated in 2007, you continued on with the graduate degree?**

Chana Lawson 18:28

Yes. I went to Chapman University for my master's, and that was in organizational leadership. And I also, once again, I always make it more hard on myself. But I got a graduate certificate in human resources development and management there as well. So I went straight into that. One of the staff members here named Shelly Jo Enscoe at the time—she has a different name now because she's married—but she had said, "Why are you waiting?" You know, because I was preparing for the GRE and doing some different things. And I was like, "Well, maybe I'll take a year off." But she was like, "You've got to look at this program over at Chapman University." And so I said, "Okay, let me look at it." And Chapman, it's funny, because at one time I was going to attend Chapman when I was younger and living in California, because they're headquartered out of Orange, California. But so when I found out they had branches here, I was able to actually go to the classroom and do my master's. I took advantage of it. And they had the program I wanted, which was organizational leadership, which was business heavy, but it still had a little bit of liberal education in it as well.

**Joan Hua 19:41**

**And so, I was interested when you talked about how other students in your class asked why you cared to build a community when you were all already so busy with your work, and you kind of knew what you were trying to get out of the experience. Would you say that you knew that's what you wanted to do before you started college? Or started this time around at UW Tacoma, you knew that you wanted to be involved; you cared about community. Or was there something you saw when you got here on campus that inspired you to do that?**

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Chana Lawson 20:23

It was something I saw and got recruited to do. So that's the other thing. But there were discussions between students like they would complain about stuff. They would say, "Ugh, they never have anything for us." You know, these were students that were in evening classes because sometimes I had to come in evenings, because I would work during the day or whatever. So they would say, "They never do anything for us." And so that was one of the things that I'd say, "Well, maybe we can change that."

But I wound up in a class one summer, over the summer, and I had seen the Black Student Union on campus doing things, and I would show up, but then I would be like, "I gotta go to class!" I could never stay and really enjoy what was going on. But I knew they were active, and I would try to show up for some things. And I spoke to the president—it was LaTanya Boyd McKinney, was her name at the time. Because she had said, "Well, just stop by for something to eat at least." You know. And so I had mentioned to her that, "Well, you know some students say you guys don't do anything for evening students. You know. What about those students that have to work during the day, and then they come in the evening?" And so they were like, "Yeah, we're trying to do something." So over the summer I wound up in a course, and it was in my nonprofit management curriculum. And I met a man in there. His name was Albert Purnell. And he asked me. He said, "You know, you're very likable." And I said, "Well, thank you." And he said, "You should be an officer with the Black Student Union. Did you know that they're looking for officers for the Black Student Union?" And then I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'll be president because I'm already, you know, but I'm trying to recruit some people, and I think that you would be good for that position, for maybe vice president or something like that, because people like you, and you seem to be such a leader in the classroom and stuff like that." So I had said, "Well, my mother was in BSU." So that was another reason why I kind of wanted to get involved as well. My mother was an officer with the Black Student Union in St. Louis, Missouri. She went to Webster University. And so I had seen her being active and then I had been involved before as well with her, just helping out when I was in high school. But so when he mentioned it, it wasn't like an odd thing to me. And I knew BSU was around but I wasn't thinking about putting my time into really doing it. I had just been talking and saying, "Well, what can we do?" But then he said, "You should do." And so then he said, "Let's go over and talk to Student Life." So we went over and talked to Student Life, and they got me on board. And that's where I started getting active. So if you ask me to lead, I'm going to lead. So once I got into position, I said, "Okay, this needs to happen. This needs to happen. This needs to happen." And everybody was like, "She wants us to do all this stuff. What's going on?" You know, so it was just getting them motivated to moving because now we had been inactive over the summer. So now it was just getting those activities. So it was more that I was recruited into it. But had I not been on the campus itself that time, I probably would have still been trying to do something, but I don't know what it would have been. But because they pulled me in at that time, that's when it was like, "Okay, let's do this."

Joan Hua 23:45

**So what were some of the things that you and the students were discussing or saw that needed change or, like you said, needed to happen?**

Chana Lawson 23:54

So we identified—because we did discuss some things, analyze some things. So we had identified that there were some existing silos between student organizations at the time. There had been some experience from the past where they all were like divided or something. And so we said we wanted to break those walls down. So we wanted to collaborate and be more open. And so that was one of the things that we did, was we started to make things happen, where we could do events together with different groups. We also encouraged a group to—there was a group that was underrepresented on the campus; it was a Native American organization. Because I have Native American heritage, that mattered to me. We talked them into starting a Native student org, and we supported them by becoming members from the beginning, because you had to have so many members—I think it was six members that you had to have. And so that was one of the things that we did, was that came out of it. But we also collaborated with them because to get them started, they needed to have participation. So we did some events together, or we showed up to their events to support them. During Latino History Month ... I mean, we covered every history month you can think of. Women's History Month. Civitas was created that year. So that's an organization group that's on campus now. We did some things together. With SAB we collaborated. We came up with what was called the block party. Because I grew up in New York, so I told them, "We could do a block party." So they do a block party now still. I saw that, that they still do block parties sometimes with the student orgs and stuff. All the different orgs coming together and doing that. So those are just some of the things that we identified. We did do some activities for students who were evening students. We actually started to have two meetings. We had one in the daytime, and we had one in the evening. So we had greater participation because of it. Even though there was a small number of people at night, we still took the time to have an hour meeting with them, and then to get their feedback, and then they could participate. And then we also created some daytime events and some nighttime events. So we got rid of all the complaining as far as, "They do nothing for us!" And so we made people accountable: "You said you wanted an evening event; you need to be at this event." You know. So a lot of people started to attend. A lot of community started to attend, especially when we did the evening events. I think that brought in a lot more. We had people coming from Seattle. And we did events that drew people in. So that, I think, that is something that I saw. So that's one thing that when mentoring leadership that comes in now, we kind of tell them, you know, "You want to include everybody. Just try to think about being open to including people. And what do you guys want to see?" It is still up to them. But we share some of the things that was kind of a challenge for us. But of course, they're in a different environment now that it's a four-year university. So they don't always have to do stuff at night.

Joan Hua 27:29

**I was also curious whether you were looking at the other needs of students. So, for example, was it challenging for students to come in and figure out how to navigate the system of transferring their credits or choosing what to major in and things like that?**



**That's usually a Student Services kind of infrastructure, part of the university. But was the BSU also helping with some of that?**

Chana Lawson 28:08

Yeah. So anything that students had a challenge with, it was always open to the—like, "What do you guys having challenges with? We want to know so we can assist and support and things like that." So, we did do that. And then we also brought staff in to talk to students. We wanted students to know who actually did what, where their offices were, if they had any questions or challenges. So we would bring the people in the speak as well to that. So sometimes we will bring that in. But some students had struggles with, like you said, maybe they got a F because of something that maybe could have been worked out or maybe it was a misunderstanding. And so, we would guide them through how we should best handle that. If a student was treated unfairly, the BSU would come together. We would say, "What do we want to do about that?" You know, "Do we want to write a letter? Call a meeting? What do we want to do?" So we did do things like that as well. So people could come, and they would say, here's what's happening. And if you hear it more than once from multiple students, then you know there's a real issue. So we did offer that opportunity, as well as to have that support, so that we can make a change or impact it; guidance. Very early on, we did lean on alumni. We asked if the former president could meet with us. We didn't know how to contact her. So we went to Student Life, and they contacted her for us. And we talked to her about some of the challenges we were having as well and what to expect. And then there were other alumni like Gwen Ford was another alum from another year that somebody connected us to. They had said, "Oh, you guys ought to talk to Gwen Ford." So it was good to know where the alumni were, because also if we needed them to come in and speak on something, or if we ran into something where we had to write a letter, we would say, "How did we do this? How do we do this? Did you guys have that problem? And how should we go about it?" So there was community members like alumni, and then also there were some faculty and staff that would also support us, say, "Well, the best way to handle that is this way." But yes, we did help students with anything academically that we could support them with. We even had tutoring. At one time we had tutoring where high school students can come and we partnered with, I think it was, Shiloh [Baptist] Church here in Tacoma. And they were bringing students. It was a woman named Sedonia Young, who's a leader in the community as well. And they were bringing the students to the BSU. And we would sit right outside of what they call the equity and inclusion center [Center for Equity and Inclusion] now; it was the Diversity Center then. So we would use the chairs out there and do that. But we also would tutor each other. So students would tutor each other and help each other with different, you know, assignments at the same time.

**Joan Hua 31:08**

**And did the BSU intersect with the faculty and staff affinity groups? Or were there groups like that among staff?**

Chana Lawson 31:21

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We didn't know of any. I do remember that we—Lisa Rankin was an advisor to the BSU, so she would connect us with faculty and staff or who would be important to go to and things like that. But I don't remember any particular faculty events that we actually were invited to. Or maybe it was an invite, but we didn't see the invite. I don't remember any actual affinity groups, but I know that there had to be some because most universities or colleges will have some for faculty, but I don't.

I do remember Some collaboration where there was a graduation celebration. So the multicultural graduation celebration and then the black graduation celebration we were invited to, and that was here. And one of the faculty members, Marian Harris, of social work, she was a part of the, I think it was, the multicultural one. And then there was one that we were invited to in Seattle. So UW Seattle would reach out. Their alumni group or something had something going on, where they wanted to recruit Black Student Union members from UW Tacoma because we didn't have alumni group here, or Alumni Association; it was headed out of Seattle. So they invited us out. And then we went to a black graduation celebration to support, where we were actually part of the graduates on stage as well. So there was that type of collaborative thing going on. And I know some faculty were involved in that as well.

**Joan Hua 33:01**

**And when I talked to Jamie who overlapped with—she attended also 2005 to 2007. She said at first she didn't realize the BSU on campus had existed or it was active before. So how was the continuity there? Was that your experience too? Or did you—it sounds like you knew of previous presidents and officers.**

Chana Lawson 33:28

Right. So when I entered campus, I looked for the BSU because I just ... like I said, my mother was a BSU officer. I was like, "Do they have a BSU?" And I had actually worked with someone at the airline who was a part of the Black Student Union at UW Tacoma, and I used to ... she used to come, and when they would raise funds, I would buy things from her and stuff like that. So she actually let me know about that there's a BSU at the UW Tacoma campus. So I knew it. A couple years before I even attended UW Tacoma I knew there was one. So but with Jamie—she was in one of my classes, psychology class. And I talked to her and recruited her into the BSU to be a secretary, because I said, "We need a secretary. You would be really good." We were study partners. And so then I told her about the BSU. And she did say that she didn't know that there was one and stuff like that, but I was like, "There is one. It's just that we have to get active. But we need a secretary." And so she thought about it. And then she said, "Okay, I'll do it." And so, she came on board, so I talked her into it.

**Joan Hua 34:37**

**So you already knew that there was one.**

Chana Lawson 34:39

I already knew.

**Joan Hua 34:40**

**It kind of became more active as, kind of, during your time on campus.**

Chana Lawson 34:46

Right. Because the challenge was, every spring they do an election, and what the challenge was, was that they asked people to come in and be the new BSU officers, the people who were graduating. But nobody stepped up to the plate that year, that spring. So they were without officers. So then you have one person, and he used to be in the BSU, but he had to get it started up again. So that's why he was recruiting people, to say, "Hey, we don't have any officer. We only have me and I'm going to be president, but I need this many people. We had a meeting, but nobody wanted to step up for the new year." And he was still going to be at UW Tacoma for one more year. So that's why he wanted to recruit and get it active again. And I was like, "Yes, we need to get active." Because I had gone to a couple of the events and stuff, and I thought it is absolutely necessary. I actually would have, I was looking at, the different campuses I was looking at was WSU and some other campuses. But I was looking for a BSU to be on that campus or some kind of multicultural group or something. Because then I would know that there's some support there for people that are of color like me. Women, even women's groups. So there were certain things I was looking for overall on a campus that I thought it should be there. So yeah.

**Joan Hua 36:17**

**And I guess what you found out about UW Tacoma before you came was satisfactory for you to choose it.**

Chana Lawson 36:26

Yes. And it actually absolutely was the best place for me. There were challenges here as a student. There were things that needed to be changed, but I was one of the champions of change for different things to happen—whether I was helping another student group—I belonged to multiple groups. I mean, there were different groups I would go to and be a member, but I was limited to how much I could do because I was an officer for the other organization, and you had to channel your energy because you still had to get your grades as well. So that's the other challenge. I knew how to multitask and balance and do things, whereas some students that come to the campus for the first time, they may not know, pretty much, the time management skills and things like that. So that's another thing, is just knowing that there's some students that would struggle with that type of thing. So having the resources and making sure that it's known what is available to students makes it a whole lot better on campuses for students.

**Joan Hua 37:26**

**And you mentioned things that needed to be changed on campus. And earlier, before we started the recording, you talked a bit about hiring and how BSU had influenced campus administration on their decisions regarding hiring. Can you talk more about that? And things that you observed or you saw, that you knew about?**

Chana Lawson 37:55

Well, the things that I saw that were in place, and once we actually looked at the records—there were some records that were left behind from the previous BSU. So that's how we were able to delve in and kind of see what happened before we came, or before we were coming into leadership with the BSU. It absolutely made a good difference to see Dr. Adams on campus. However, every time I tried to register for one of his courses, it didn't work for my schedule. So. Dr. Ignacio, being able to be in her classroom and have hard conversations, but also still make it a safe space for people.

So there were other classrooms that I would be in, where I did not feel safe in the space because things were being said. And, at the time, you had the Race, Ethnic, and Gender Studies going on. And so sometimes I felt like the professors did not make it a safe space, or they did not address certain things that maybe a student would say that wasn't quite right. So I would voice my concern about that after class with the professors. I do remember having to struggle with one teacher, one professor, who was out of Seattle, but she would come teach, it wasn't psychology, it was like journalism or something. But she gave me a really, really hard time, and I felt like this is where students will have a hard time. I was treated differently. I was maybe one of only three black people in the classroom at the time, and I was coming from work. And so I would be a few minutes late to class. There were other people that would be really late to class, and they were younger than me. So that's another thing. It could be age; it could be race. But she would allow them, the younger ones, to be late. And with me, it would be a few minutes, and she would have, you know, she would say, "That's going to impact your grade," or something like that. And I would say, "Well, I'm coming from the airport. And there's a lot of traffic." And this would be in the winter that this was happening. So I would say I'm doing the work. I was A student. You know, I'm not doing this purposefully. I'm trying to get here. I have two little children too that I have to get to daycare. So there were just some things that I really spoke to her about. There was one time where there was snow, and UW had said you don't have to come to campus. They even posted on the website. She docked me, and it brought my grade down. I would have gotten an A. I think I got a B- but she docked my grade, and she told me, "I'm giving you this grade only because you're a good student. But I had to dock you because you didn't show up for the presentation." And I said, "Because I'm in Puyallup, and there's ice and snow, and I'm unable to come. And the message on the screen says you don't have to as a student." But I could have appealed that, but at that point, this was one of my last classes, and I just wanted to graduate and be done. And so I just let it go. But I did share that with Dr. [Linda] Ishem later. But it was a couple years later that I shared that with her, and she was like, "You should have done something, spoke up, you know." And so I try to tell students, "Don't wait and let it go. You need to address it right away." So that's one of the things I learned, and here I am. I was 32? 30? Maybe 31, 32. And I still just let it go. So sometimes, when you're

in the space and you don't feel safe, or you feel like you're being discriminated against, whether it's for age or race, whatever it is. Why was the expectation set for me so high, but then you allowed other people and never said anything to them about coming in? And I would only be about, I swear to you, three to five minutes, because I would be on my stopwatch, and I would say, "Oh, I'm two minutes late," or, "Oh, I'm three minutes late." I never was like really, really, really late, like, an hour or anything like that. So, yeah. So that's just one thing, is that with other ... it's like, I want to say, cultural competency and just the understanding of what type of student you have makes a difference. So if you have adult students who are working nine to five, and they have children and stuff like that, if a professor has a problem with them, you know, being a few minutes later or whatever it is—it could be something else—but to actually listen when the student tells you what is really going on or just realize that people have lives and that there may be something going on. "Let me sit down and talk to the person" instead of saying, "No, I'm just gonna downgrade you to this grade." You know, I just felt like the person didn't care, that basically she wanted to give me a hard time, you know? So, I don't know. That's just some of the things I saw, was that it definitely made a difference in certain classrooms to have people that look like you, came from a similar background or that they just understand your culture or what is going on with you, than it did to be in a classroom with somebody who didn't.

**Joan Hua 43:37**

**And earlier you talked about how you felt you had benefited from some of the previous work that other students had done or advocates of the hiring of faculty of color, and how you're trying to continue that work. For example, you mentioned how the BSU had advocated for the hiring of Dr. Luther Adams, and that was before your time, but you felt like that put your experience in a context that you benefited from. And then that also gave you the desire to continue in doing that work.**

**Chana Lawson 44:29**

Yes. For example, just on a small scale, I could never get enrolled in Dr. Adams's class, but I could buy the book, so I could still read and learn. Even if I couldn't get in his classroom, I could still access that. I had access to it. There's a teacher here, Dr. Kayaoglu. Turan. He was the first professor to come and teach about Islam here. So he came on campus at that time. And I know that it was from the benefit of what had happened, is that they needed more diversity on campus with professors.

He came on campus, and I tried to take his class. I even registered for it, but then something came up. And I could not do his class. But I bought all the books, and they're still on my shelf at home. And I still reference those books. And I've become good friends with Dr. Kayaoglu. But when I was the Black Student Union Vice President, we did have him come in when we were celebrating Malcolm X. We were trying to recognize and dispel some myths about Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and things like that. He came in and was one of our speakers, and we asked him right away to do that, because he had the perspective of Islam and things like that, but also those, the perceptions around people who are of Middle Eastern or African descent, and having that religion of Islam at the time, because of 9/11 and things that happened, a lot of

people really needed exposure to that type of diverse learning, about something that maybe they didn't know about; they just had stereotypically heard things. It was very important to have him on campus. And so I bought those books, and I read those books, and he sent me the syllabus because I was registered. And I started doing, like, writing papers about that, you know. Had I not had that type of professor on the campus, I wouldn't have had access to it. And I wouldn't have been able to hear his viewpoints, because on the syllabus, there were certain articles that had to be read, and certain points. And then you got to make your, you know, you wrote what you were learning but also backing up what you learned and why, you know, really made a difference.

And that was even, all that whole thing of having a Hispanic professor, people from different backgrounds. Even if you look at people coming in from Europe. Having the background of somebody from Ireland and being able to bring some of that perspective into the space—that all happened because of what they [Black Student Union] did. And so, yes, I've benefited from it. And it can be as simple as just having this type of material at your access, or even having somebody I didn't get to take his class, but I was able to meet with him for coffee and discuss it. I was able to talk with him about even what I was going through at the airlines working at the airlines at that point. Hearing what happens to people when they get on airplanes in certain parts of the country and how they're discriminated against there and how it impacted America. So it definitely made a big difference and it definitely becomes a different space. And you get to learn a lot about both sides, the opposition of certain things that people don't believe in, but then also what people do believe in, and then decide for yourself where you stand on the issue is important. To hear everybody is important, but just making sure that it's done in a safe space in a safe place, and it's being done the right way is key. And I think that that allowed the avenue of that to happen because it hadn't happened as well like that before. I only know because of going through the records of the BSU, some of the newspaper articles of what happened on campus and certain issues that were addressed. There were other issues that were even, you know, outside of just having professors on campus who are diverse, where there was racism on campus, and then they had to address that and pretty much make whoever accountable for it. So these are newspapers that were printed from the Ledger, so you can even access them and see some of the things that went on, but I had a very good respect for, "Wow, they really changed the space because that's not happening anymore." Or maybe it is happening but it's being addressed, or there's an opportunity to address it.

**Joan Hua 49:13**

**And so, from your personal experience—I guess I'm interested in hearing about some of the individuals and stories. And so from your personal experience, when you experienced things that felt like discrimination or that you knew were discrimination, who did you talk to? And were you getting support from staff? You mentioned Dr. Ishem and Lisa Rankin. Can you talk about those folks and maybe some stories around that?**

Chana Lawson 49:50

## University of Washington Tacoma Oral History: Founding Stories

Yeah. So Lisa Rankin really supported when there was transition, even with the Unity Breakfast. She came in. There was another advisor that we had. And he had taken a position in Seattle. So then she came on board, and she had been the advisor before for BSU before at UW Tacoma. But she helped us by actually being there for us to talk to and then advising. You know, if we said, "Well, here's what we're going to do," you know, she would guide us to say, "Okay, that might be the right way to do it, that might be the wrong way to do it." I'm trying to think of something in particular.

So the Martin Luther King, Jr., Unity Breakfast, there was a lot of people that were against that at first. So, we as the BSU wanted to bring that to the campus. It's now in its 13th year, so it definitely was worth it for it to happen. We came up against some pushback. Now, it wasn't really ... I can't really say it was racism, but what I am going to say is that I don't think it was really important to some people. Okay. So, because they had never had an event on the actual holiday on the campus, we came up against red tape when it came to union politics because there were workers who were union here. So they were saying, "Well, if we do that we'd have to pay them double-time-and-a-half or, you know, by contract." But we had already talked to different parties, and we asked them if they would be willing to volunteer; maybe they'll come even without getting paid. And they say, "Yeah, we'll volunteer." So there were some people who were on board to be here on the campus. So the higher-ups were saying, "No, it can't be done."

So going to Lisa because she was also a union rep as well. I didn't know that but she was a union rep on the campus. She advised us the best way to have the discussion. Well, it turns out that the chancellor who was on campus actually had a similar vision, had said, "Wow, they don't have anything for MLK Day on campus?" So she actually sent for us to speak to us about it. And so we sat down and spoke to her. We told her what the vision was: that we wanted to have a breakfast, we wanted to bring the community, and how important it is that in a scholarly environment that we celebrate a man that brought so much to the education sector—everybody has learned from Martin Luther King, Jr., in an educational environment and in personal life—and things like that. And so how can you not celebrate him on the actual holiday? And so she actually said, "Okay, we'll do it if you guys get a speaker, a keynote speaker." But then the university was closed for a couple of weeks. I think it was like winter break. And so we did a lot of work to get the keynote, and once the keynote was confirmed, it was a go. But in the interim of that, there was some pushback from certain professors that were like, "That's not important." You know? And they didn't look like me. So to me, I was like, "Oh, but if we were doing Abraham Lincoln, or if we were doing George Washington Day, you might be okay with that." You know, so kind of—we did feel kind of a pushback, but it was, we understand a change, and maybe some people just didn't want to work on their holiday or whatever it was, but we felt like people could say, "Well, Martin Luther King Day is a day off rather than a day on to serve the community." So that's what we wanted to change. But in that, we did feel some pushback, and we felt like that it was kind of minimizing an African American male who had given so much to America and so much to society at large. So that's one of the things. And with Lisa Rankin's guidance on how to do it with tact, we were able to have some meetings with the higher-ups,

like the chancellor and some important people, to get things done. And then once we did that everybody came to the table. Because once the chancellor was on board, then everybody pretty much was like, "Oh, the chancellor wants us to support that." And they already had volunteers and stuff like that. So we got it done. People got paid whatever holiday pay they had to get paid.

And then professors were actually sending students to the event. So that was another thing that was an important piece of having ... maybe somebody like Dr. Ignacio was able to talk to faculty, professors and say, "Can you guys make an assignment, like, whatever your assignment is, does it fit with this? Can they come to the event and write a paper?" Or whatever. And so everybody got on board with it. But I do think having that voice—because people did respect Dr. Ignacio. No matter what their beliefs are or race and stuff, they respected her as a faculty member here. And then there were some other people like Steve Smith that was over in Advancement. So a whole bunch of people had to come together to make it happen. But we also had to go to student organizations. And we pretty much had every student org: LGBTQ, Native student org, Civitas. All the student orgs came together and they supported it because they said, "You're right, this needs to happen." So having everybody at the table and having that support made a difference. But at first, there were people that were like, "No. It's not important." And I think that sometimes when it comes to an African American experience, it can be minimized, that they'll say, "No, that's, that's not important," you know. And so, that would be one of my main experiences where more than one faculty member kind of came in and was like, "No, I'll go ahead and talk to them." Or, "Here. Here's how you do that," you know. We had the support with us. So that's just an example on that.

**Joan Hua 56:10**

**And who was the chancellor? Vicky Carwein, or?**

Chana Lawson 56:13

No, the chancellor was ... blond hair—

**Joan Hua 56:19**

**Pat Spakes.**

Chana Lawson 56:21

Patricia Spakes. Yes. That was Patricia Spakes. And she was a new chancellor to the campus. So she had just come in. So that's why she thought it was kind of odd too, because she had been on campuses where they do MLK Day on the actual holiday. So she said, "You're right. I noticed that since I've been here. You're right. And I was thinking the same thing." So she actually supported that.

**Joan Hua 56:47**

**So this was 2008?**



Chana Lawson 56:50

2007. It was 2006 to 7, but the actual holiday was January ... can't remember the actual date, but January 2007.

**Joan Hua 57:00**

**And you were planning in 2006?**

Chana Lawson 57:02

Yeah, but we had ... so we started planning in December of 2006. So we had a very short amount of time because she had said, "If you get a speaker." And so we actually got Norm Rice as the first speaker, because we knew that he was skilled at bringing communities together. And we thought that he would be perfect. There was another speaker who was a good friend of his, can't remember his name. But we were going to have that person, but they were unavailable at the time. So we asked Norm Rice. And Norm Rice was teaching. He was like a visiting lecturer or visiting professor over at UW Seattle. And so, once he heard what we were trying to do, he was like, "Okay, I'll do it." And so he came. We did that in a quick amount of time. But in between, while we were on break, we were meeting with the Black Collective. We were presenting to the Black Collective. We were at the Urban League. We were at different places, saying, "This is what we want to do. And here's the reason why." And so the community came on board. So, I have to say, the community has been on board every year since. Every year this thing gets bigger. We went from the Longshoreman's Hall. They had the Bill, William Philip Hall. We went there. Now we're at the University Y, 'cause it's just gotten bigger. And now it's like, "Okay, we might have to go to the Convention Center this time," you know. But it's good to see that the Black Student Union continues that, and they continue to work with the university, and then that the community continues to support it. And hopefully, students are increasing over time. This time, we had a lot of high school students in the room, and then we had some alumni in the room. Alumni have been supporting it as well. So it's been—yeah, it's kind of surreal to see how it's grown. But that's one of the things that I saw just walls being thrown up, like, "It's not that important." And I was just like, "If this was George Bush, there wouldn't be a problem." You know? And so but then they finally, and then once people were in the room, the good thing is, once everything was done, and they saw how successful it was, and we had a really good showing—because I think the first one we actually had at Mattress Factory. So you can imagine. It's a small space, but there was like over 80 something people on that first one. But they came back, and they said, "You guys were right. You were right." You know. "You're right." And some of my friends said, "Yeah, I was saying, don't care, don't matter. You know, don't, why do you care? But I see why you care. This is really awesome." And one of them, her name is Filma Fontanilla [Anderson]. She's an alumna, and her son is with the Black Student Union at UW Tacoma. And he's the one that performed the violin. I think it was the violin last year at the Unity Breakfast. But he was one of the active members of the BSU last year. So she can see it full circle, that, "Oh, my son is now involved in the BSU. And, you know, my friend is mentoring him." So, it comes back full circle. He definitely got active in the BSU. And it's funny because his mom is the one, she's one of the people that said, "Why do you care?" You know, and I had told

her then. I said, "Well, for the future, for people coming behind us—your kids, my kids." And I wound up with her kid in the BSU. So yes, it's been amazing.

**Joan Hua 1:00:40**

**And can you describe the initial idea how that came about? You said it was to have something on the day of MLK Day. The idea was something in the scholarly community, maybe a breakfast. But what was the initial idea that you were proposing?**

**Chana Lawson 1:01:00**

We wanted to break down the walls because, even in the community and having discussions, a lot of people have perceptions about UW Tacoma that weren't quite on point. And so, we also noticed that there was, we were like, "Okay, how can we increase community being on campus and knowing what's here?" They didn't know everything that was here on this campus. People just knew. "Oh UW is over there." But they never, like, some of them might have stepped foot around UW Tacoma, but they hadn't actually been on the campus in a while unless they were serving on a board or something. But it was to break down silos even between the community and the campus. Like, make more people aware of what the campus was doing and the students on the campus. Some people said, "I didn't even know, how many Black students do they have there?" You know. It was to break down silos between student orgs as well and bring everybody to the table and make sure that people knew what a vital resource that the university was and what it could be if we all came together. So not just, the community is never able to access. Because most universities know that, "Oh, I can go to the library and use some of the resources there." So one of the things, and one of the classes—Dr. [Stephen] DeTray, who's a professor here, or he was back when I was there. He was doing the nonprofit management courses. He brought us to the library to learn how to research about grants, because in the nonprofit world, you got to get funded, so you need grants. And he would say, "People can access this and learn about where to get grants from" and stuff. And I was like, "I didn't know that." And who knows that? Like how many people come here to use it, you know? So that's just one example of knowing what the vital resources are and knowing that the library can actually be open to community as well. If they're on the campus, and they can see it, and they know it, and they can talk to people, then they can use it. So we just wanted that to be a segue and then also for people to build together and see, "How can we make change even in the Tacoma community?" Outside at large, how many organizations need volunteers? How many internships are out there? What startups are happening? What young people are doing organizations where they want mentoring. And they can get mentoring from college students or from alumni or from, you know. So that was the important piece of what we were trying to do, is connect community with this academic environment, but understand that this academic environment is part of the community as well, that people that get their degrees here, they're working in the city hall, they're working jobs around in the community, or they're going to go work jobs in the community. So it's still community. And how can we come together to unify and get some things done as well, such as serving in the community on a day like Martin Luther King Day? Where can we find service opportunities? So we also brought community organizations in on that, because we did a day of service as well with the DRC at that time. And so it was like, "Oh, we can actually go

out here and feed the homeless or do something in the honor of what Martin Luther King would have wanted us to do."

**Joan Hua 1:04:33**

**And when you approached some of these organizations such as the Black Collective, what was their response?**

Chana Lawson 1:04:46

They understood the challenges. They were open to supporting us, and they said if there was anything needed—some of them had been a part of Black Student Union organizations, so they offered their help and assistance even with leading on some things. They sponsored—they were like, "Yes, we'll buy tickets. What do you need from us? What do you want us to do?" And we told them what we wanted, and they showed up, and we really appreciated it. And they said they knew how hard it was being at the table trying to make something happen that's different, you know, the change that needs to happen. And so they were just open to whatever we needed. They were there for us. So that was their response, was that, "Okay. We can do that."

**Joan Hua 1:05:42**

**Today is January 22. And the last Unity Breakfast was this Monday, and you were there. How did that make you feel? It was kind of full circle for you also, but you've continued to stay involved every year.**

Chana Lawson 1:06:02

Right. I've been on the committee every year. This year, I didn't have as much time on the committee because I became ill for some weeks—there was some bug going around that had me down. But I was still able to contribute and still able to come to some of the meetings, and I mostly also helped the BSU with anything that they needed. For me, it was great. Just seeing everybody in the room, I'm like, "Here we go again." And then new people in the room, but also one of the alumnis. She flew out from D.C. to come here just for this event, because she's one of the former officers that we mentored and she's done it. So she was able to meet with the BSU and talk to the students and stuff like that and let them know that, "I was here at one time." You know, she'd graduated, I think, back in 2016? But she told them, she shared her experience.

But for me, it's like a circular, sort of. They have this saying. It's like a circle. And it's supposed to happen this way, where you share your knowledge. Somebody picks that up, and then they do it, but they chart their course with it, but they keep the legacy going. And so for me, it was just, like I said, kind of surreal, kind of seeing this growth, and then seeing the students still thriving and getting the professional development and still able to function as students and get their degree, but they come away with something more like relationships and being able to network and the skills that they learn from it but also build long-lasting relationships. We've had members from previous students are now married and have children, and they're alumni. But being able to see that, it's like, "Wow, they met because of BSU or because they were in a student org, and they were getting engaged on campus. And now they're married and have two

children, and they still support the BSU." You know. So yeah, it's been an amazing experience, and just watching it grow, I just, I love that, knowing that, "Wow." You start with something small. And it's really bigger than yourself. And it just keeps going. And you don't necessarily have to be all involved in it. It's just going to keep going because you've already prepared people and left something that they can pick up and move with it. They can kind of change some of what they want to do with it. It looks different every year. But it's, you know, whatever the issues are that they focus on, that becomes the theme, and that's what kind of drives it. And so, yeah, it's been a great experience.

**Joan Hua 1:09:06**

**And what other projects or capacity have you been involved in with the University of Washington Tacoma?**

Chana Lawson 1:09:16

So I serve on the Alumni Council. I served on the UWT Alumni Council as secretary this past year. I was on the council before that as just a member. And I've been able to increase some alumni engagement support and things like that. I brought other alumni to the table in different events that they said they had never been on campus for a while, but they came on campus and saw how big it's getting and all these different offices and stuff. So they've been able to engage and do more volunteering and stuff. I've been able to support even down at the Capitol. When we had alumni legislative day, we went down there and spoke to elected officials and talked about the need for keeping the Washington State Need Grant. I even talked about how they should pay UW faculty and staff more money. So I was able to say, "You need to pay them more. They do a lot of work. I've seen it with my own eyes." So different things like that—politics and being there to have a voice about what can still change in the community, and what can change around, in the higher education community. Because I also work for a university, I've been able to do that. I also helped create the Black Alumni Weekend for the first time ever here. And that was in conjunction with the students, and we were able to get their voice on what they would like to see with alumni engagement, how we can support more. And that's an initiative now that they want to do every year. So that's some of the changes that we've been able to do, you know, that I've been able to do on campus with alumni, and bring people more involved. So, I think, from what I'm seeing, I think that this will be a greater place as people do more innovative things, because there's so much great work being done by just different people in the community and alumni that it'll be a greater place. But those are just some of the things that I've been able to do, is being involved on the Alumni Council. And we go down as we support UW Seattle's Alumni Association sometimes and so I stay pretty active.

**Joan Hua 1:11:48**

**Yeah, I don't know, it seems kind of unique and really a blessing for, like you mentioned, for example, for a student organization like BSU—and especially in the early days when the students are only here for two years—for there to be someone who wants to stay involved and bring that continuity over the years to make sure that the efforts are put into things that can grow over time. That's kind of amazing and, like, unique for student**

**organizations, as a lot of times, with student organizations, the challenges is there's so much turnover and the legacy is hard to preserve.**

Chana Lawson 1:12:45

Yeah, and I do have discussions with other student groups here. One of the things I was able to do was the Alumni Council asked me to speak about how to get education done, how to get your degree done, and what you should be looking at, and what the best way is to pretty much survive here and really just stay inspired to keep going. And I was able to speak to students from all backgrounds, and I was able to share with them about time management and kind of, "I know they told you you better get the degree; it's going to be so awesome in college, and then you get here, and it's like, 'Nobody told me how to do this,' or 'Nobody told me how to navigate that,' or 'I'm having a hard time making friends.'" You know. So we had that discussion. So I was able to do like a little experiment thing with some students here as an alum and contribute to that. But I also got to speak to like the Muslim Student Association, and I actually connected, with the Black Alumni Weekend, we connected one of the Muslim students, who helped create the first MSA, with the actual MSA members. and have him speak into the students as well on how things went when he was here, because he was here after me, but he's one of the people that I mentor, but he was able to get engaged and bring that back and say, "Yeah, you know, it was BSU at first, and then BSU helped start the MSA. And so just knowing that, that a plant sprouts and then there's petals and then it drops a seed and then there's another one that spouts, and it's among the students as well as the community. It's just, it's really important. And like you said, it is pretty unique, I think, to be as consistent as we've been, but I feel like it's very important. I do feel like when things don't go your way a lot of people like to say, "You know what, forget it. Why put my energy into it?" But to me, it's like you got to look at the bigger picture, and eventually there will be something that sprouts from it. There will be something that you'll get to see. You just have to really have faith that that's going to happen. And I think if you can have faith that's going to happen, no matter how stagnant things get, or what the challenges are, if you just stay in it, there's always, it's going to be worth it in the end.

**Joan Hua 1:15:22**

**And so, because you work so much with the community and you are involved in these other organizations, from your point of view, how has the relationship between UW Tacoma in the surrounding community evolved?**

Chana Lawson 1:15:41

From what I can see it's just, it's very complex, because there's so many different little relationships happening in the grand scheme of things. I think it's evolved very well from what I can see. There's been some ups and downs. You always hear something. But I believe that people do see UW Tacoma as a vital resource. I believe that some of the growth of UW Tacoma happening has made them more visible in the community. There is some worry about property, as far as—what's being bought up, where this is going to go, are you pushing people out? But there's also housing needs for students. So that still keeps students in this area. So there are some challenges because when you grow, you have what they call the growing pains and stuff

like that. But for the most part, from what I can tell, the relationship has expanded, and it's more open, and people are more accepting now. They understand more what UWT is about—like, they have an understanding, even just about the MLK event that brings everybody back to the campus from the community. There's people that have told me, "I've been here since the first one, and I'm coming every year." They're like the first ones to buy tickets, and they're coming still. And they're like, "I love it. Every year it gets bigger and better."

So, from what I can see, the relationship is really great. So there's lots of opportunity for more relationships in different ways. I've seen different things happen, from STEM programs to different collaborative efforts. I remember coming across something, I was on a board, I came across something that happened with the group here at UWT that had to do with environment. And I was really shocked. They had gotten a grant out in the community to do some watershed and some other stuff, and they were doing it out of a middle school, but it was like from UW Tacoma. So I was like, "Wow, I didn't even know that was there." So that made me proud, and it made me proud to be a Husky because that's what you do. But it made me aware of: "Wow, there's always something going on that somebody can do." So I believe that the relationship has gotten a lot better and that UW is, from what I can see, they're investing more in the community in different ways. I've found being at different tables, that they are putting their money where their mouth is, I guess you can say, that they're investing in supporting certain things outside in the community that I didn't even know that they were supporting. So yeah, I think it's good. I think it's getting better.

**Joan Hua 1:18:30**

**As we're getting close to the end of the session, thinking about the evolution of the UW, or evolution of the campus, or UW Tacoma, how has it changed over time? So you were talking about relationships with the community. But overall, thinking about, maybe, the relationship between students and faculty and staff, or your sense of the student body and the diversity of it—some of some of those aspects.**

**Chana Lawson 1:19:05**

So that would be good to ask a student for sure. But I can kind of speak on what I've seen. So the relationship is getting better with the students for sure. From the feedback I've heard recently from certain students, that they feel like they're more welcome and that they have a voice on different things that they want to do on the campus. So that's a big deal because students have to feel comfortable that they can do that. Some of the changes I thought were really awesome as far as bringing in somebody for counseling purposes for students. I remember they had a position open, maybe a year or two ago, and it was somebody here that got the position, but providing counseling for students is important, but also reflecting what a student ... a student can look and feel comfortable with the person who can help them. So I've heard that they're still working on some of that, but that they had some students that would be interns that are a part of that. So I think that's very important. Just the fact that you're another student, and you're helping case manage or whatever, provide resources for me if I'm homeless, if I've lost someone and I'm grieving, and I can go to somebody to speak—that's important.

The creation of the pantry is important because students sometimes, you know, having to pay for certain things. I do think the students are unique at UW Tacoma, where I've seen them carrying two and three jobs, and this is as freshmen and sophomores. I see them carrying these jobs and that they're working like that. And I'm like, "Wow, they're, you know, so young and they're doing this stuff. They hardly have time for anything!" But the economics of it, having to buy books, having to pay for housing and things like that. Some of the stuff that I've seen at UW Tacoma, the new housing program that they're trying to create or that they're doing, where they can have students get some kind of money to stay in housing, is important, because there have been students that were homeless that—I knew there were a couple that went homeless when they were here. This is before they had like the apartments and the, you know, student housing as they call it. So those are some of the changes that have made a big difference. Students have told me even that, for them to get a meal, to be able to go over to the pantry and get a few things and knowing that, "Okay, my money ran out early this month. I can still eat." Going over to the Equity and Diversity Center, and them having a cook off, and then people being able to eat there and having snacks—that made a difference. So it's more of a welcoming space, I feel, for students, especially students that face unique struggles or challenges. So those are some of the things that I've seen, and it is making it better for students. There's still some work that needs to be done. But I think overall, if I compare it to when I was in school and seeing the different things that happened over the years, I will have to say that it's getting way better than it was before, especially because of all the resources that are available to students now.

**Joan Hua 1:22:34**

**And I have a question that's: who do you think the establishment of UW Tacoma benefits the most? It has definitely a big impact on the economy of Tacoma. It's in downtown Tacoma, which really shaped the neighborhood and, some would say, revitalized it. But you also mentioned there's concerns about property and who is pushing out. So, how would you answer that question? Who do you think the establishment of UW Tacoma benefits the most?**

**Chana Lawson 1:23:14**

I do, you know, just from the business perspective, the stakeholders, definitely. But of course, you have to have stakeholders for something to be supported well. So the stakeholders have to be taken care of. But I'm not sure what it's going to do to the community as far as pushing people out. There are other initiatives happening in the community to build more affordable housing. So that's supposed to hopefully impact and take care of people having to be pushed out. And so right now ... I still think the benefit is still more with the students. I do. Overall, when I look at it, they have to have an education. They have to be ready to go out and get jobs. The provisions have to be for them and then those coming behind them. So I still think the benefit is more for the students. And it has to be. Because of the budget, the stakeholders, and everything that's invested in it, this place doesn't happen without students. This is what it is for, is to feed those students the knowledge that they need to succeed and go out and possibly come back and bring good things here, too. So I would still say it benefits the students the most. I do think

the students have a lot of power. It's just that some of them just don't know it. But once they get in the space and they see things they can influence change in the environment that's needed. So, and I'm seeing that, even with the pantry and all these different things, it took for students to speak up and say, "Yeah, we want a pantry." Or, "Yeah, we need that. We need homeless—we need an apartment we can afford," you know. "We need parking. We need more parking. We need affordable stuff." So I think that it definitely benefits the students the most. And that's really the way that it should be.

**Joan Hua 1:25:18**

**And my last question is, what do you see as the likely future direction of UW Tacoma?**

Chana Lawson 1:25:27

There's so many opportunities for UW Tacoma. I do see more expansion as that's pretty much on the horizon. That's a really good question. I believe that there's so much innovation that can happen. I think that there will be an increase of engagement from the community as well as alumni, students who have left here. It can become more of an anchor in the academic community, as far as having feedback from students that have left here and also support from them. I think that that is something that is increasing and going to increase over time. I think that, I can see it, that it will be a place that people can go to and say, "You know, if you really want change, you need to go to UW Tacoma. Those people are really doing some things over there." So I see it as a place where people will really come if they have questions or if they even want to be inspired or in the know about things. I do see that UW Tacoma will become the hub for that. Because we have other universities here, like University of Puget Sound that does the Race and Pedagogy Conference, I see something great coming similar like that to UW Tacoma, where there's like—we had the Unity Breakfast, but I think there's going to be more. So just a place that people do see as a vital resource is what I see coming for UW Tacoma, and then for people to come back. And even the ones that haven't attended UW Tacoma, I do see that the community will support it. So I see that coming greater in the future, becoming greater. So I see it as becoming more of a community anchor, is what I see happening.

**Joan Hua 1:27:30**

**Okay. Before I turn the recorder off, is there something else we didn't touch on that you want to add?**

Chana Lawson 1:27:40

No, I think we touched on a lot of things. I don't mind coming back.

**Joan Hua 1:27:45**

**All right. So we'll end here today.**