

BFI Foodscape Mapping Project – Oral Histories
Category: University Health Services

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Transcript of interview conducted with

KIM GUESS

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Organizational affiliation: University Health Services

by: NATHALIE MUNOZ and NATALIA SEMERARO

MUNOZ: This is Natalie Munoz and Natalia Semeraro with Kim Guess, on September 29th, 2017 at University Health Services. So what is your role at University Health Services and how long have you been here? and when did you arrive?

GUESS: I arrived here in February of 2014 and my role is Wellness Program Dietitian. Basically what I do, is I am responsible for nutrition related programs for faculty and staff on campus. And a little bit of my work kind of affects students too, just because we're targeting the whole community. That includes nutrition classes, cooking classes, nutrition counseling, behavior change programs, I'm working on a nutrition policy-- so a lot of variety.

MUNOZ: We also read that you volunteered at an organic farm in the Central Valley, what was that like?

GUESS: I think there's actually a typo on our website-- it should say Central Coast.

SEMERARO: Maybe I didn't read that correctly?

GUESS: It does say valley on there, it should be coast; It was outside of San Luis Obispo. So that was part of the WWOOF program. I volunteered at a farm for a month and it was a really cool experience because I got to see firsthand what organic farming is like. And I learned a lot about what the lifestyle is like too. I learned how small the profit margin is for these farmers and the creative ways that they have to try to make enough money to support themselves. For example, the farmer that I worked with got a grant to plant native plants around the perimeter of the farm. And so that actually helped him make a little bit more money or have more money to spend on the farm equipment and seeds and feed for the chickens and all those types of things. But basically the day started off at 6:30 in the morning. We would put wood in the pot belly stove to try to heat up the house a little bit, because it was 20 degrees when we woke up.

SEMERARO: And this was over summer??

GUESS: This was October. So this was fall, not even winter. So it was 20 degrees out and we would make breakfast and then go change the water for the chickens and feed them. We just had chickens for eggs and then we would start working around 7:30-8, kind of as the sun was starting to come up. We'd work for a few hours, have lunch, work a few more hours in the afternoon. And it would be 80 degrees out, so there was a huge variety in the temperature! We would do a lot of weeding and not really any planting at that time, more harvesting, getting ready for the farmer's market. Then towards the end of the time I was there, we were clearing out all the crops. And then actually using the chicken manure and spreading it across the field and turning everything over and planting cover crop to try to add nutrients back to the soil-- so I got to see a little bit of the transition in just a month.

MUNOZ: Do you still keep in touch with those farmers?

GUESS: Not really, I haven't. But if I'm ever in that area I'd definitely like to stop by again.

SEMERARO: We just wanted to hear about it, it was exciting to read. So, being that you're working in a University setting, how are student concerns different from staff health concerns? And if you want to speak more to the faculty and staff side, because that is where you mostly work, it would just be great to hear about that.

GUESS: I'll start with the faculty and staff side. With employees the typical age range is somewhere around 25 to 65, for the most part. Sometimes they have people who are a little younger, a little older, but the health concerns that we're worried about are more heart health, diabetes, obesity, cancer, those types of chronic conditions. So we're working with people on fitting exercise into their day and making better nutrition choices, and reducing stress, and things like that... Bringing lunch to work, finding time to walk or exercise, on their lunch break or in their office. With students the focus seems to be more on things like alcohol, sexual health, mental health is a really big one, and those are things that just by working in this building-- you'll see that those are the big issues. It is a pretty different focus, but with students we do want them to have good habits for their adulthood in terms of lifestyle, so eating healthy, learning how to cook is a big one (there's more work being done there, now, than in the past), and being active and things like that. But then on the other hand there's also a lot of Eating Disorders on campus. That's a really common issue, so there's kind of a fine balance or it's little bit trickier to talk about those kinds of things with students, because they might be more at risk for disordered eating.

SEMERARO: It seems like both ends are dealing with food and diet related, either diseases or issues, you were saying you've been working on a nutrition policy, what would that look like? And it's not necessarily forcing people to make changes but what would a nutrition policy look like?

GUESS: Our proposed policy, which hasn't quite passed yet but we're hoping it will soon, is mostly about just having healthier options available and making them more accessible and keeping them affordable. So it's not so much about taking anything away, but just making sure we have those healthy options -- the vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, plant-based proteins, minimally processed foods, water as opposed to sugar sweetened beverages (which are everywhere), and some of the less healthy foods. So not necessarily taking those away but just trying to emphasize the healthier foods and have the marketing focus on healthy foods and having pricing discounts more for the healthy foods.

MUNOZ: On campus, or?

GUESS: Pretty much on campus. Some of the restaurants on campus, beverage and snack vending, and also meetings and events. There's some guidelines in the policy about when university funds are used to buy food or drinks for events on campus.

MUNOZ: Making sure it's more fruits and veggies than pastries and stuff?

GUESS: Yeah and we've had the Eat Well Berkeley Program for almost 10 years now. That's kind of doing the same thing that the nutrition policy hopes to do, but it was on a smaller scale and it's a little harder to gain traction with that because it wasn't coming from the top down as a policy. But there is a healthy meeting and event guide that we put together to encourage healthier options at meetings, including things like activity breaks and there are sustainability guidelines in there and stuff like that. We have an Eat Well Berkeley Catering program and the Berkeley Restaurant program and we also work with the vending machine company. We've been doing this for awhile, now it's just time to make it a policy so that it can start running itself and it's not as much work for us.

MUNOZ: How do you see equity and inclusion play into your everyday work? How so in a big picture? or a small picture, whatever works.

GUESS: That's something I've had to think about a lot, because it's not really on the top of my mind, it's just kind of in the back of my mind. It has been ingrained into us here. But we try to make our programs and workshops accessible to all employees. It's hard to explain the big picture, but maybe just a few smaller examples... things like, for our cooking classes, I try to pick recipes that are simple, affordable for everybody and I try to have a variety of different types of cuisine so that it can appeal to a variety of different people. And that's the same for when we try to include recipes into our newsletters and programs to try to have a nice variety and have them be pretty affordable. Another example is for our behavior change programs that we do. Rather than rewarding the outcome, so for example if we have a walking challenge or a steps challenge we don't reward people for getting the highest amount of steps, for one because you're rewarding the people who are already doing well which aren't really our target audience as a wellness program, but just to make it fair to people, so that the people that need the program most for the encouragement don't feel discouraged by the people that are getting the highest amount of steps and the most activity. So we don't reward the high amounts, we just reward the people for participating.

MUNOZ: That makes sense, you want them to at least engage.

SEMERARO: Is there anything more you wanted to add about this? Do you have a personal approach to addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in your life and in work too? Because you are at Berkeley, obviously you have these values and I think everyone working here seems to, but if you have anything more to say on that personally or how you think those things could be better addressed potentially.

GUESS: I made a little list here. I mostly made a list about how it ties into the programs we have.
[Audio clip removed as requested by the interviewee]
We also offer the "Know your Numbers" health screening, basically to the entire campus. We have these fasting health screenings here at the Tang Center and to try to reach more

people we have gone out and done it at other locations or we do these screening with just one department if they have enough people, then we'll go out to their department. But we also work with what are considered the high risk job classes. So high risk in terms of health risks and workers comp. injuries and things like that. We've actually gone out and done these health screenings and we have a wellness specialist who works specifically with that population, doing programs that are tailored to them.

MUNOZ: Who is that?

GUESS: That's Lindy. With the health screening, we're reaching people that might speak different languages, so we've had a lot of the materials translated into different languages. Sometimes we have health educators that speak other languages too. Some of the programs that Lindy does with them are paper based and a lot of those employees don't use computers regularly so a computer based program that I might offer to the rest of campus wouldn't really be accessible to them. So she customizes the programs for that population and sometimes translates some materials and things like that.

MUNOZ: You called it a fasting screening? What does that-- can you unpack that a little?

GUESS: Sure. The "Know your Numbers" health screenings are where we check the blood pressure, we take a little blood so we do cholesterol, triglycerides and glucose. We also do weight and waist circumference. And we go over the results with them right there. The whole thing takes about half an hour.

MUNOZ: How often were those done did you say?

GUESS: The health screenings, we offer usually 3 at the beginning of the semester and that's just open to anybody who wants to register and we'll usually go out to the high risk groups, maybe once or twice a year and we might do 3 or 4 screenings with them and

then we go out to departments just as requested. We maybe do a total of 10-12 screenings per year.

MUNOZ: Wow, ok. I mean if you have a high risk group, I'm sure you want to keep a closer eye on them.

MORRIS It also lets us see what the health risks are and kind of customize the programs for both groups really. And it's a way to refer those people into our programs if we have somebody with blood sugar that's a little high, we've done a prediabetes program in the past-- we're trying to help them you know prevent these issues from becoming more serious. And if they're numbers are really off then we'll refer them to their doctor, but we're trying to take a more preventative approach and get people to be proactive about their health. We sometimes get people who just don't go to their doctors, or at least not very often, so it's not meant to be a replacement for that but at least it's a little bit of a check, so they can see how they're doing.

SEMERARO: Beyond health, what does food mean to you?

GUESS: Ah yes (laughter). What does food mean to me? Originally, when I first started studying nutrition it was just about calories basically. Because, even though when I was in college, it wasn't that long ago, but still the focus was really just on calories, a calorie's a calorie, and how we should just eat less calories. But I've learned over the past several years that's not really the best way to look at food. And I've learned about how complicated it is between how the food is grown, and how it's processed, food marketing and what the food companies are doing and how they affect sometimes the government recommendations. What I've noticed as a dietitian when people focus too much on calories and grams of fat, and things like that, they're not enjoying their food. I think food is meant to be enjoyed and it's meant to be a joyful part of our lives. But unfortunately a lot of people don't have a healthy relationship with their food. So that's something else that I keep at the back of my mind when I'm talking about nutrition and

running programs and teaching classes-- not to talk about calories, but talk about food as something that we should enjoy and using lots of flavors and taking time to savor our food and not be so restrictive. I get a lot of questions about restricting food and things like that and it just doesn't work for people in terms of being healthier or losing weight. I'm always trying to foster a healthy relationship between people and what they're eating and I try to do the same for myself.

MUNOZ: And what is a memorable moment for you from your career here on campus, related to food, equity and inclusion, or both, or just a memory that has stuck with you that has been impactful?

GUESS: The one the that I thought of, it's actually not really related to food, it's more related to exercise. And that's with the "Amazing Walk Program" that we've done for a few years. Basically it was modeled after the show, the Amazing Race, and so there was a leader board. It was all about tracking your steps, so people would enter their steps online and there would be this leader board in the newsletter every week. And so the first year that I did the program, I heard from people saying-- "oh this isn't really fair, this person is going out and doing these 60 mile bike rides every weekend and they're always at the top, how am I supposed to compete with that?" And I would say, yeah that's true it's hard to compete with that, but we're not rewarding those people it's just a leader board that doesn't really mean anything in these newsletters, but it still stuck with me. And when I did the program next year, I said, well why do we even have this leader board if its not helping anybody except for the top ten people? And it's discouraging people and we're not rewarding them based off the most steps anyway. The following year, I just got rid of the leader board and I created what I called "the 100 Grand Club." Since it was a partner based challenge, if together both partners got a total of 100,000 steps during the week (which would be equivalent to say having each person do 10,000 steps 5 days a week, if they're only tracking during the week, or if they're doing the weekend too they could maybe be getting 7 or 8,000). If both partners are able to do that, then they'll make it into this "100 Grand Club". That way it wasn't just the top ten, it was

anybody that was meeting that would be in there and if they weren't in that club from the beginning, hopefully they would strive towards that at the end. And then we would do random drawings for people that made the club. It was just one little way of trying to make the program a little more fair and to include everybody -- which is kind of another reason why we don't reward the outcome. Because let's say you have someone who isn't able to do a lot of walking because of a disability, but they're doing swimming or some other activity, through this tracker they can translate it into steps and still be included in the program.

SEMERARO:

That's awesome, I like that. That's all we actually have for you, thank you so much.

MUNOZ:

Yeah thank you for meeting with us and taking the time with these questions.