

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

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Transcript of interview conducted with
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MUNOZ: This is Nathalie Munoz and Natalia Semeraro on July 28th 2017 in Berkeley, California at University Health Services for UC Berkeley and we are here today with Toby Morris and Elizabeth Aong. So let's just get started. What are your roles with University Health Services?

MORRIS: I am a registered dietician and I provide clinical nutrition here at the Tang Center. I am on the eating disorder treatment team here, so I help to coordinate that team. I am also helping to lead the outreach and education efforts around nutrition.

MUNOZ: And how long have you been working with University Health Services?

MORRIS: I've been here for five years now.

MUNOZ: What got you interested in working in health services with UC Berkeley?

MORRIS: Well, this is a really rare job in the world of nutrition. It's hard to find a job that meets all of your criteria for a job. In a place you want, working with the type of population that you want, around topics that you're passionate about... And I was really really lucky and thrilled when this job became available because it really is-- it's like a plum. Full time nutrition position. A lot of dietitians, I think, end up having multiple, part-time positions to kind of

design a job that really fits them and their goals. This job really fit me to a T because it is in this wonderful place; this institution that I love and it's with these great wonderful students that are amazing. So working with a population that's really motivated and smart and interesting and diverse, but also working with topics that I am passionate about. So food and nutrition, both on the clinical side, but also wellness and prevention, it just fits me perfectly.

MUNOZ: Well that's pretty great that you got your dream job, that's what we can all hope for [laughter]. What do you try and prioritize in your role as a dietician here?

MORRIS: What do I prioritize? I always put the clients and patients that I work with first. So I feel like that's my role here. It's to help improve the health of the students that I serve.

MUNOZ: So when you have a student come in for an appointment, what do you hope that they have learned or have gained from leaving an appointment with you?

MORRIS: That's hard to answer as a blanket statement because it's different from person-to-person, I think I always aim to help [the] client get what they're coming for, so I always start by finding out what it is that they want to do, what they're hoping to get from the session. Then I try to help them achieve that, but the goal really of a dietician is to, at least in this setting of providing nutrition counseling, is to help someone move towards making positive behavior changes. That's my aim.

MUNOZ: If students want to change their mindsets toward food, if they can and have the resources to do that, what resources are available to them?

MORRIS: Can you elaborate a little bit more, when you say change their mindset?

MUNOZ: When they have decided "I want to do something about the way eat," who can they go to? Is going to a dietician one of many resources or what resources are out there?

MORRIS: I think the reality of making changes is that it happens in lots of different ways and some of those ways are kind of organic and not necessarily formal resources that the university is providing. So for example, a lot of students that I talk to have some kind of change in their attitude toward wellness or, for example the relationship with food, because something in their life changes or they have some kind of 'aha' moment. Whether they aren't taking good care of themselves and something kind of happens to them health-wise during an intense time in the semester, or maybe someone in their family has a life change, or maybe a friend of theirs is a really strong influence on them. Sometimes I think changes come about when something happens in somebody's life that motivates them and it becomes this window of opportunity. Once they do feel motivated and are interested in making a change, that's usually when they'll come in and see me for a one-on-one appointment because maybe they're having health issues related to their diet, right? So they might refer themselves to see us here for a one-on-one medical nutrition appointment. Maybe their doctor or other health care provider refers them, so it could be that their therapist or their doctor or their nurse practitioner refers them to us. So, what might be a reason why we would see someone in our one-on-one medical appointments, but we do have lots of other resources and I'm really thrilled that that's now developing a lot this year. We have drop in nutrition counseling which is really nutrition education sessions. So, they're briefer, they're more general topics. It's basically an opportunity for students to ask those questions that they're curious about food and get some guidance without going into perhaps as much depth. Maybe they don't have any real medical issues related to food, but they just have a lot of burning questions about food. Maybe they're wanting to fine tune the way that they're eating and now we offer these drop-ins sessions. They don't need to make an appointment, they don't need a referral, they don't cost anything. And these are available at the Tang Center now and

we're developing lots of other locations on campus where these are also now available. We just added the RSF so students can drop in on Tuesday afternoons and talk to a dietician, one-on-one, for maybe twenty minutes and get some tips on just their questions about eating. So, that's also available and we're starting to develop a lot more cool resources. We're going to be doing food demos, education at different places around campus... So what has been mostly available just at the Tang Center, is now this year really broadening to a variety of locations. For example, I'm at University Village doing hands-on workshops with student parents and families at least once a month and probably more often, starting very soon. There's more and more developing now, which is really exciting.

MUNOZ: That's amazing! That's really cool, especially the drop-in-- I could imagine that that would be really helpful. So beyond health, what does food mean to you?

MORRIS: That's a big question. [Laughs] Beyond health, what does food mean to me? Food, to me, is a lot of different things. It's sort of the glue that holds people together. It's really that common ground that you can find with almost anybody. So anytime people get together, it seems like food is always a really good component to have present. If you ever notice when you go over to somebody's house, people tend to gather in the kitchen. My family too, my family we all hang out in the kitchen together around the food, around the cooking. It's just that glue that holds everything together so for me, it's pleasure, it's sort of-- a social glue, it's also a health. It is kind of like medicine; something that fuels my body and helps me, supports me in health and just in doing the things I wanna do in life too. It's also my living, right? It's the thing that I do for a living so it's a lot of things in my life.

SEMERARO: You really got that question. It was pretty broad and we were-- we've been trying to talk about how to ask something like that and just to hear a little bit more about what you thought. Obviously it is your complete job. I'm going to take the next question. As a dietician, what is your approach to helping students who may face some sort of food insecurity or an eating disorder?

MORRIS:

Well, that's a lot of the students that I work with. I always try to remember, again that what I do needs to be really patient-centered or client-centered so I try to always do a really thorough assessment to find out what's really going on with this person. And again I try to keep in mind that my job as a nutrition educator or counselor is to really help someone move towards making positive behavior change; so helping them eat in a healthier way that makes more sense for their lives and their bodies. I also need to help someone identify what the obstacles are to achieving that goal and sometimes those obstacles are financial, sometimes they're psychological, sometimes they're logistical. Sometimes they don't have a kitchen or they have a really really dirty kitchen that they don't want to use, maybe they don't have a car [and] they can't get to thtve two kids and a partner and they're getting a graduate degree and they just can't handle it all and they're overwhelmed, maybe they have some physical disabilities that are making it a lot more challenging for them to take good care of themselves. I've had clients who have multiple of those factors. So my job is to help them become clear in what those barriers are and then to help them understand those barriers and then get the tools they need to be able to work through those so that they can successfully make the behavior change. I don't always get there but it's a step-wise process and sometimes it takes a long time and it's a team, right? So I can't do all of that. I can help steer somebody in the right direction and maybe have some-- gain a little bit of insight into what their own barriers are.

SEMERARO:

A lot of it seems to be on the very individual, personal basis but can you speak a little bit to how connected food insecurity and eating disorders are or what you've seen in your past couple of years?

MORRIS:

Right, yeah I mean there was a study that just came out about this looking at-- I can send you the link. Looking at people with food insecurity and the incidence of disordered eating behaviors and there's definitely a correlation there. I mean of course, if somebody has periods where they don't have access to food and then all of a sudden they have access to food, it leads to really irregular eating patterns. It also means that that person has more

stress in their life and we know that stress correlates with using food for coping, right. So it's really interconnected and so I see it a lot and-- I'm sorry what was the original question [laughter].

SEMERARO: I just wanted to hear about the connection between food insecurity and eating disorders.

MORRIS: I think it's definitely correlated and again, food insecurity can take a lot of different forms. So it can be that someone doesn't have consistent access to the right type of food or the right quantity of food, but it can take different forms as well. So even someone who has some of those other barriers that I previously mentioned, that can create a sense of food insecurity as well. Food insecurity, experiencing that as a child, even if you're no longer experiencing it, it makes an imprint and it affects relationship with food and many people that I work with have past experiences. They might have trauma around food. They maybe were abused around food, or meals, or feeding, or weight. That all in forms your relationship with food in the present moment. They may not even make that connection but that's part of my job is to help to unpack all that and there is a correlation between disordered eating patterns, whether that means manipulating your food intake to change the shape of your body or maybe it means using food as a way to cope, either restricting food or binging on food or engaging in other disordered eating habits. Or maybe it's not eating enough and then binging on food, right, which food insecurity can really lead to that pattern and then it can become a habit and it can become a way of coping. It's really complex and it is all intertwined for sure.

MUNOZ: That answers that question very very well but we're going to steer this ship in a different direction, how can-- I realize we didn't really have a very good transition-- how do you see university health services accommodating the diversity with staff but also with students. What is the approach in that?

MORRIS: I feel like UHS does a good job at trying to model diversity so our staff itself is fairly diverse and we put a huge emphasis on trying to make this the safest space for all types of people as possible. We

also are making efforts to educate staff the best that we can on being really savvy in this area and being able to serve all types of students and really making diversity a priority. I think there's a lot of effort on campus in addressing basic needs security and UHS has definitely been part of that process all along. For example, when the student food pantry first was being developed, I was in those meetings trying to help and guide and trying to give my input on that. And my colleague, Elizabeth, here is-- we were able to hire her to come in because of funding around basic needs security so we, with this added support from campus have been able to now broaden our scope so that we can provide services that are in different shapes and sizes to meet the needs of all types of students on our campus who maybe don't have money to pay a \$15 copay for a medical nutritional appointment. They might not have time to come to a 45 minute appointment. They maybe can't make it to the Tang center so we're taking our show on the road. We're trying to meet them where they are and trying to provide and really different types of services that will address the needs of all different types of students. I am most excited about these new developments cause I think the demand has come from the students. The students have said they want these types of services and we are trying to provide that and UHS has been incredibly supportive of those efforts.

MUNOZ: And how and what has been your approach to addressing...

SEMERARO: Do you have any more to say about your specific, personal approaches to equity and inclusion when you see individuals. I don't know, you probably don't do a lot of outreach work, I'm not sure, but if you do, do you have a personal approach?

MORRIS: When you say outreach, do you mean going and promoting services to students? So we are now, because of our new wellness grant that we got, we are able to do a lot more outreach and getting out into different student communities. As dietitians, part of our professional training is to really become sensitive and aware of cultural differences and individual differences. Every single person has a different way that they eat. That's informed by a lot of different things. There's cultural influences, social

influences, socioeconomic influences, personal preference, family, geographical location, all of that. So we, as a profession, I speak for us here at the Tang center, we're quite aware that that is the case. We try not to make assumptions about how someone's relationship with food based on what they look like or anything else, what their name is, we know that it's really important to become not more knowledgeable about cultural practices and personal differences with food, but really also not making assumptions. Like finding out who that person is and what their relationship with food is and then I think, so when we're in a one-on-one situation, we're really skilled at doing that because that's so important before you can provide any kind of helpful advice to somebody. You really have to know where they're coming from and what their relationship with food is. In terms of going outside of the Tang center, I think, I'm in a learning mode. I want to know from the students from our campus community. What is the need? We're still in that information gathering time right now because the wellness grant is less than a year on for us so we're still doing a lot of meeting and talking and asking questions rather than telling and giving. It's more like really finding out, again food is that common denominator, so we show up, we offer some food, we talk, we give a bit of nuggets of information that we have but then it's asking and learning about what will help our campus community the most around food.

SEMERARO:

It does really seem like UHS has been a leader and made sure that equity and inclusion has been included in programs from the start. Can you talk a little more about the wellness grant? It's a pretty broad name. What does it do? What will it do?

MORRIS:

Our particular funding, is coming from students, so the students voted to put some of their student fees into wellness services and that's really broad and that's lots of different things on campus. They were able to extend the urgent care hours with some of those funds and etc. All around campus, all different kinds of things happening with those wellness funds. We got a tiny piece of that pie and ours is called "Well Nourished Berkeley" and it's basically we were able to hire another full time dietician to help be able to take our services outside of the Tang center and now

we're doing all of these things that I mentioned like drop-in nutritional counseling, more kind of food demo, food and cooking demonstrations at various locations, I'm doing workshops. We even created, which I'm really excited about, a work study program. This is with funds from the basic needs security as well as wellness funding, we are hiring 9 students, undergrads, to become peer nutrition educators to go into their own communities and provide nutrition education and resources. They're going to be covering topics of general nutrition for wellness and health, also food and cooking skills, so they will be assisting the professor in NST 20, for example, which is a really new cool course to teach students about food prep and cooking skills. They will also be addressing body image and eating disorder prevention. So they will be offering workshops to students on campus to help prevent eating disorders. I'm just really thrilled about this new program. It's the first semester that we're doing it. We just selected our 9 students and we're still in the process of onboarding them but I'm really excited about how that's going to expand our services too.

MUNOZ:

Where would some of these lessons take place? In that class? Where exactly on campus would that happen?

MORRIS

It's going to happen in a lot of different places. Some of these events that these students are going to leading, they'll be at first-- they're coming in with various levels of knowledge already about these topics, and so first few weeks is going to be intensive. Kind of like a bootcamp training them on these topics, and then midway and toward the end of the semester, they'll be both shadowing the dietitians doing these services-- like when I go to University Village and do my cooking workshop, they could come. You know, one or two of them will come with me and assist, but then, as they get more skilled and experienced, we're also hoping that they'll be offering their own presentations, workshops, demos, blog posts, videos that they make themselves and they are going to do those in their own communities around campus whether that's in a sorority, or in a club, or in the residence halls, or maybe we're going to go to GBC and do

something, or maybe we're going to go to different places and do these kinds of services. So keep your eyes peeled because they're going to be around campus.

MUNOZ: Definitely! So, lastly, what is a more memorable moment for you from your career here on campus? I know it's only been 5 years but what is a memorable moment relating to food equity and inclusion, or both, for you?

MORRIS: Well, when I found out that we were awarded the wellness grant, that was a pretty thrilling moment because that is coming from the students themselves. The committee was made up of students. They voted to spend the wellness funds, they selected our proposal as one of the places to give the money and that was-- it's really a thrill to be able to be validated. This is a service that the students want and it feels like it's a good fit so that was really exciting. But that was a broad success... Recently I just had a student that I was working with for about a year and she just graduated against all odds. Like against just incredible adversity, she was able to graduate and do well and she's on her way now, has job interviews and she was working with me as one of her care team providers. She just wrote me the loveliest thank you note and it was really touching and made me cry and it was that personal appreciation that made me feel like "Oh, I was able to help this person and look, she has wings and is flying and is doing this amazing stuff now." I mean, it's because of her, but it reinforces why I do this job and it was really special. I feel really privileged to have been able to know her and try to help her along her journey. That was really meaningful and that is why I do this job.

MUNOZ: Well, that's all we have for you, but that's really sweet. That's great that you get to have those kinds of connections with people. That's what I hope for my job [laughs] in the future. But yeah, those are all the questions we have for you but thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us again and taking the time to answer these very broad questions [laughter].

