

Lisa Chau Adv'06  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World  
January 16, 2013

DONIN: Today is Wednesday—

CHAU: The 16<sup>th</sup>.

DONIN: January 16, 2013. This is our first interview of the new year. Yes, it is. My name is Mary Donin. We are here in Rauner Library with Lisa Chau. I've said that right, Chau?

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Okay. Advanced degree 2006. A MALS student, right?

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Okay. All right, Lisa, the first question we would like to ask you is—this is really by way of sort of background and put all this into context that we're going to hear from you, but tell us how it is you came to Dartmouth for your graduate degree, where you were before, and the process of deciding to come here following graduation from your undergraduate college.

CHAU: I grew up in New York City and attended Hunter High School on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. After I completed my undergraduate studies at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, I spent several months living in Hong Kong. Professionally, I worked as a financial analyst for Tommy Hilfiger, a logistics manager for a biotech startup, and a public relations executive for the Tuck School of Business. Currently, I serve as Dartmouth College's assistant director of affiliated and shared interest groups in Alumni Relations.

DONIN: Had you been thinking about graduate school when you left Wellesley, or was it the process of going to work, deciding that you wanted to get an advanced degree?

CHAU: I always knew that I wanted an advanced degree, and the timing just seemed right in about 2003. I had been living in Hong Kong, and I returned to the States in the early 2000s.

DONIN: Mm-hm. And what did you know about Dartmouth at the time? Had you been looking at various graduate programs and discovered this one through some connection?

CHAU: Dartmouth mailed me a pamphlet by post, I was not really looking at other programs. It caught my interest, and I knew of it because it was one of the schools I had considered in high school but I didn't apply to. I looked further into it and thought it was a good opportunity.

DONIN: Now, growing up in New York, what was your reaction when you came here and realized that you were sort of out in the boonies? Did you come visit before you actually enrolled?

CHAU: No, I did not.

DONIN: Ooh!

CHAU: I did not know anyone when I arrived on campus, which was different from my undergraduate experience. My friend from the eleventh grade actually had gone to Wellesley the year before me, and so I knew I would have at least one friend at Wellesley when I arrived there. In comparison, I did not know anyone in Dartmouth. I had never been to Hanover. But, having spent four years at Wellesley, which is similar in that it's a highly competitive school located in a small, upscale town, I expected the culture shock to be minimal.

DONIN: And I guess the difference between those two places, Dartmouth and Wellesley, is that Wellesley is, like, half an hour from Boston, right?

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: You can't say that about Dartmouth.

CHAU: No.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

CHAU: I was in Boston quite often. There were regular buses going from campus to MIT, partly because a lot of the Wellesley students would take classes at MIT, so we had regular

shuttles back and forth. On the weekends, it went to MIT and then Harvard – Getting to Boston from either was simply an additional ride on the T.

DONIN: So was that a difficult adjustment for you when you got here and realized you were two hours by bus from Boston?

CHAU: As a student, it wasn't as difficult because I had friends on campus, and when I was here, I was in a relationship where my partner would come from Manhattan to visit me or I was going to visit my mentor in Michigan. During my second year of grad school, I was visiting my mentor once every two months. And I stayed with him for about a week or two at a time, so I wasn't on campus very much.

DONIN: I see. Right, right. Well, that's possible when you're a grad student.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Yes, yes, especially now with the technology that allows us to do everything far away.

So how did you find the community here when you arrived? After getting off the bus, you had to settle into Hanover. How did you go about finding a community? Was it through, say, your classmates in the MALS program?

CHAU: No, it was definitely not through the MALS program. I arrived on campus, and coincidentally I was looking for an inter-campus mailbox. I don't remember why. I think it was to drop off a thank-you note for someone. I was in Collis, and I asked a student about inter-campus mail, and it happened that the student went to the same tiny high school I did. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Amazing.

CHAU: Yes. He was a brother in Alpha Theta, and as a graduate student, I was also looking for housing in Hanover, because I didn't want to have a car for the two years I would be here as a student. At the time, in order to meet more people, I was also going to Monday night dinners at Amarna, where I started speaking to another undergraduate who was a

brother at Phi Tau, and she told me to look into housing there because they often had rooms which non-brothers could live in. I visited Phi Tau, but they could not offer me a room because I was a graduate student. However, I got to know a lot of the students there. I had fun, and I joined the next term, as a graduate student.

DONIN: Aha. Is that unusual? I don't know that much about Greek life.

CHAU: It is very unusual. Phi Tau is one of the very few Greek houses which take non-undergraduate students as brothers. We have honorary status, so I believe the college doesn't recognize us, but otherwise, the house does recognize us as full brothers. And in fact, they take an interest in people who are not students, even, so you can be someone local, who is not affiliated with Dartmouth, and still join the house.

DONIN: Aha. That's very open-minded of them.

CHAU: Yes, it is.

DONIN: And that's the only one of the fraternities or Greek houses that does that that you're aware of?

CHAU: I believe Tabard also does that, and I think Alpha Theta sometimes does it. I'm not sure what their ongoing guidelines are for that.

DONIN: So did that become your primary community here?

CHAU: Yes, I would say so.

DONIN: At Phi Tau?

CHAU: At Phi Tau. I also worked at Kiewit, at the help desk, so I met some students that way as well.

DONIN: And did you have a job while you were here?

CHAU: Yes, I worked at the help desk at Kiewit. That was it.

DONIN: Oh, that was your job.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: At one point, you said you were writing for *The D*. Is that right?

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Or was that later on?

CHAU: I didn't really consider that a job, since I wasn't paid, but I was a staff photographer and a reporter.

DONIN: And that was because you had an interest in journalism?

CHAU: Yes. I've always been interested in photography. My first camera was a film camera made by Canon, the A-1, that my uncle had given me, and that's when I started taking photos. But actually, I grew up in the darkroom. My father was very, very interested in photography as well, and growing up, we had a darkroom in our house, so I spent a lot of time in there with my father. I never learned how to use the chemicals, but I definitely have an interest in photography.

DONIN: So how would you describe the makeup of your community here? Did it change much? I mean, you joined Phi Tau. That was your primary source of feeling like you belonged here.

CHAU: Phi Tau was a very large part of my social network while I was in Hanover as a student, but I was also a Dartmouth Newspaper reporter and photographer, on staff at Kiewit with the help desk, I went to the Monday night dinners at Amarna on a regular basis... so I really tried to involve myself in the community. And I made some very good friendships during that time.

DONIN: Did you ever experience a feeling of sort of otherness here or not—like, you didn't belong?

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Did that happen as you were a student or when you were an employee later on, when you became real staff?

- CHAU: I felt otherness both as a student and as an employee because as a student, I was older than the students I was spending time with. I was a graduate student where they were undergrads.
- And as an employee, I felt otherness because at the Tuck School, the average age is in the mid-20s, so I was still older than all of the Tuck students while I was working there. And in terms of other employees, I fell into the niche of single, childless, carless person in the Upper Valley, which is very rare. And so, I found it very hard to find people who could relate to my situation.
- DONIN: It's hard to be up here without a car.
- CHAU: Yes, it is. But I had not planned on staying here for more than two years. [Chuckles.]
- DONIN: Right, right.
- CHAU: And I'm going on my fifth now.
- DONIN: Yes. Yes, I guess we should record the chronology here. When I introduced you, I didn't refer to the fact that you're now on staff, and you fill that in, but once you received your MALS degree, you first went to Tuck.
- CHAU: Yes.
- DONIN: Is that right? And then you went to Alumni Relations?
- CHAU: No. I moved up to Hanover in 2003 -- I didn't graduate until 2006. Then I returned to New York. I missed Hanover, I missed the people here... I found myself coming up to visit every two months, and I decided to try living here for a while. I moved back in 2008 to work for the medical school. In 2009, I transferred to Tuck and worked there for about three and a half years, and most recently, in September of 2012, I transferred into Alumni Relations, where I work with the affiliated and shared interests groups.
- DONIN: So your time here is getting longer and longer, isn't it?

CHAU: Yes. I'm just missing Thayer. If I have Thayer, I will have completed all the stops.

DONIN: [Laughs.] Worked in all the schools.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: It's amazing.

So just back to our list of questions here. Can you talk a little bit about your sense of belonging here and whether you had life experiences before coming to Dartmouth that sort of impacted how your sense of belonging developed here, or not?

CHAU: Well, I grew up in Manhattan, and I have a very urban mindset. I like being mobile in the fact that I can get anywhere I need without a real dependence on anyone. In a city, I'm able to walk or take some sort of transportation and not have to worry about parking or maintaining a car, whereas here it's very, very difficult for me because I don't really walk past... my boundaries are basically Dick's House, the river, CVS and the gym. On occasion, I would walk to the co-op or the golf course, but that's really not that much further. I really have to rely on friends when I need to go beyond these four points because Advance Transit buses don't run very much after the work hours that I hold. Even if I can the bus to West Leb, I can't get back. And I was very shocked to find that the buses do not run at all on the weekends.

DONIN: Right. It's tough.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Very tough. They're geared purely to the working hours of the week.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: And that doesn't even count people who work on the weekends.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Yes. Yes.

So do you think that lack of transportation has impacted your sense of belonging here, because you've missed out on opportunities?

CHAU: I'm not sure if I would say that. I think most of what I would be doing in the Upper Valley would happen in Hanover anyway, so, because I live in Hanover, I don't miss out on things that happen in here. But I miss city living.

DONIN: Right, right. Yes.

So what's your ideal of a community? Can you describe what it is you look to, feel that you have a sense of community? How would that look to you?

CHAU: I have told people that I would be thrilled if Hanover were half an hour or an hour away from a major city. I really do love the community at Dartmouth, but I am a city person, and if I could spend 80 percent of my time in Hanover and 20 percent in a city, I would be thrilled, because I would have both of those worlds.

DONIN: What is it about the Dartmouth world that pleases you so much in terms of community?

CHAU: I think the students are great. They are very intellectually curious. They work hard. But they also play hard. I find that they have good intentions, and you can talk to them about any number of subjects, and they will be knowledgeable.

DONIN: And has your community changed since you transitioned from a grad student to an employee?

CHAU: My community has changed since moving from grad student status to employee in that I do spend far less time with the undergraduates, simply because I do not participate as much in the activities geared toward students -- undergraduates or graduates. And I am in contact with more alumni, partly due to age and partly due to my current job.



DONIN: But are you in touch with the grad students that you attended classes with? Do you still see them as part of your community?

CHAU: I have never really seen the grad students as part of my community. Even as a grad student, I spent most of my time with the undergraduates.

DONIN: At Phi Tau.

CHAU: Yes. And now that I'm not a student, it's even less a part of my community, with the exception of Tuck. The Tuck students are very, very good at connecting with each other and keeping those connections, but I have no ties to graduate students in the arts and sciences.

DONIN: Yes, Tuck students learn the art of networking, don't they? Isn't that part of what they learn there?

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: In the business school?

CHAU: Yes. Here's a fun story: I was walking down the hallway at Tuck with my boss, and someone came up to us and invited my boss to a class, because the class had a guest speaker – Alejandro Crawford. I sat in on the class, and the speaker was talking vaguely about a client that he had worked with, and I recognized the client as a friend of mine in New York. At lunchtime, I was sitting across from the speaker -- we were talking, and it turns out he also went to my high school! [Both chuckle.] I have continued to keep in touch with Alejandro because I have needed to get quotes for him for publications and for media, for Tuck. Now that I no longer work at Tuck, we have still kept in touch. When I'm in New York, I visit him, and we work on business projects together. This Friday, we should have a co-written piece appearing in *U.S. News* about innovation.

DONIN: That's great.

CHAU: Yes.

- DONIN: That's great. Well, that's what the business side of networking is about, right? Yes, that's terrific.
- So you've made an effort to define the Dartmouth community for you now. It's made up of—of what, your community now at Dartmouth?
- CHAU: My community right now at Dartmouth is still made up of brothers at Phi Tau, alumni of Phi Tau, as well as people at Tuck. I also see a lot of other employees of the college. It's very hard to not run into them when you're in Hanover. You can't go to the restaurants or the supermarket without running into someone.
- DONIN: Mm-hm. It's a fairly close-knit community.
- CHAU: It's a very close-knit community. And then within that community, there are also sub-groups. The Tuck community is very tight knit, and sometimes it seems like they're a completely different school.
- DONIN: From the rest of Dartmouth.
- CHAU: Yes. But they're trying to involve the undergraduates more by offering classes to undergraduates or having Tuck professors teach undergraduates on the main campus.
- DONIN: So there's an effort to integrate the—is that true also of the medical school and Thayer?
- CHAU: I know Thayer students because of the B.E. program, which is a five-year program for undergraduate students. I'm not sure that if I were not a part of Phi Tau—because we generally attract more technical-minded students—we had a large contingency of computer science students at one point. At the moment, we have several. ...Actually, I think there have always been Thayer students in our house. So I know them because of Phi Tau. I'm not sure how much I would have interacted with them otherwise.
- DONIN: Is it true that most of the Greek houses have sort of a profile or—I don't know if that's the right word, but—

- CHAU: Yes, I would say so. Phi Tau is known more as geeky, in the best sense of the word, whereas some houses have more football players or hockey players; others may have other affiliations.
- DONIN: So they each have sort of a personality—
- CHAU: Yes.
- DONIN: —of some sort.
- CHAU: Yes.
- DONIN: So it sounds like Phi Tau continues to be one of your centers of belonging here.
- CHAU: Yes. It's not for lack of trying. [Laughs.] I've tried very hard to meet people who are older than 21, but a lot of the population here, have families, and they go home to their families after work, so it's very hard to socialize with them. And without a car, I can't go to meet-ups that happen in Norwich or in Lebanon. Thankfully, I do have one friend, Vicky. She was working in the medical school, I believe, when I met her several years ago. Dartmouth has a program called After Hours, for employees to network. She has been very helpful in having me join her when there are events off campus. But otherwise, I am really relegated to campus.
- When I came back to work for Dartmouth, I made it a point to join the Dartmouth Club of the Upper Valley--I'm on the board of directors now. I'm also in the Dartmouth Film Society, which is open to the entire community, whether they are Dartmouth affiliated or not. So I appreciate that a great deal. And I've also served as the vice president for the Wellesley Club of New Hampshire.
- DONIN: Oh, yes, of course.
- CHAU: So I reached out to Wellesley alumnae in the area as well.
- DONIN: Are there a fair number around here?
- CHAU: There are a fair number, and most of them, if not all of them, are retirees.

DONIN: Oh, interesting.

CHAU: Yes. So, again, I'm not sure how much they relate to my life. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: Right, right. Yes. But you have Wellesley in common.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Right.

Have you seen a change in what the Dartmouth community looks like to you since you came here—when did you say, 2003?

CHAU: Yes, 2003.

DONIN: So off and on since 2003, you've been somehow engaged with Dartmouth, either as a student or as an employee. Do you think the community has changed much?

CHAU: I don't really see that great of a change in the community. When I came to Dartmouth in 2003, it really seemed to me that there were three groups. There were the students of Dartmouth, there were the retirees, and then there were employees with their families. There wasn't really a space for someone like me: childless, from the city, carless, single.

DONIN: And when you say the retirees, you mean these are alums who've come back here and retired?

CHAU: A lot of them are alums. A lot of them are alumni from peer institutions. I went to a reception in Baker-Berry recently, and I started talking to the people there. One gentleman was from Middlebury, and another one was from MIT. So I believe that alumni are attracted to our campus because it is safe, it is nice, there is a lot of activity happening culturally, intellectually, socially... It's a wonderful place.

DONIN: For that age bracket.

CHAU: Yes, for that age bracket. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: Right, right. Okay.

Let's see here. I'm just looking at these notes you wrote to the letters. You say you find the arts and sciences community is not as cohesive as some of the others, as in medical school, business school and engineering. But arts and sciences is not as cohesive a community?

CHAU: Yes. A lot of people don't realize that Dartmouth has graduate programs. The more cohesive programs are the professional programs: medicine, business, engineering. In terms of arts and sciences, I feel that those programs, even though slightly less cohesive maybe, they're still more cohesive than the MALS program -- a lot of the MALS students commute, because the MALS program started as a program for teachers to do during the summer months, when they had time off from teaching. It has evolved into a full-time program, but it's still, compared to other arts and sciences programs, not as focused on students living here and doing full time programs.

DONIN: My impression is it's almost like a commuter school in some ways, that students are leaving campus when they finish their classes.

CHAU: I didn't want to say that, but yes.

DONIN: I mean, it's not as residential as the other programs are.

CHAU: Yes, yes.

DONIN: Right.

CHAU: Again, I had several friends in the computer science program, in the graduate program, and they were students on campus, whereas MALS students either commuted or they were employees of the college. It's very popular among employees of the college.

DONIN: Right.

CHAU: And so, again, these are the same employees that have families, so after classes and work, they still go home.

- DONIN: They go away. Right, right. Yes, that's true.  
But now that you've been here for nine years—
- CHAU: [Chuckles.]
- DONIN: —do you feel that you belong, that you're sort of an insider as opposed to an outsider?
- CHAU: As a matter of fact, I feel less and less as an insider, even though I spend more time here cumulatively. The more time I spend here, I feel more of an outsider because it shows me how much I do not fit into the overall demographics. As a student, I felt very much like an insider. Even though I was a grad student, I was still a student, and Dartmouth takes very good care of its students, whereas now I'm an employee, and so some of the activities that I would have engaged in as a student, I do not anymore.
- DONIN: Because you don't have access to them or because you're not the right profile to be there, they're too student oriented?
- CHAU: Both. Sometimes it's because they are student oriented, and they actually stipulate that the events are for undergraduate students, or simply because I don't fit the profile and I don't want to make anyone else feel uncomfortable, and so I decide to remove myself from those situations rather than making other people uncomfortable.
- DONIN: Let's see here.
- CHAU: I do feel that I do have an advantage, though, being an alum. I feel that if I were not an alum, I would feel even more like an outsider.
- DONIN: Yes, because you have sort of a dual personality here.
- CHAU: Yes.
- DONIN: You're an alumna, and you're an employee, which is also sort of value added in terms of your role here, I would think.
- CHAU: I hope so.

DONIN: From both sides.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: It's good for students to understand the perspective of an employee, and obviously employees—it's very valuable to have the perspective of an alumna.

I guess we've talked about the location. Do you have the perception that your nine years here has changed you in ways specific to Dartmouth?

CHAU: Yes. Before coming to Dartmouth, I was very, very much an urbanite. Coming to Dartmouth—this is why I love the student body: They will do things simply for the sake of fun. There's no motive other than fun. The friends I have here would go play Frisbee, have picnics. When I was here as a student, I went stargazing for the first time on the golf course with Brooks H. Smith. It's not something you would do in the city, partly because you can't really see the stars, but also because when you're in the city, there's this mindset of—you just do different activities. And so when I was here, I went stargazing for the first time, and I have gone subsequent to that time. One of my friends who was a student at Thayer, Max Fagin, would bring out this huge telescope—it was basically the size of a small human—and bring it out just so that we could look through it and look at the planets. I saw Saturn, I saw Jupiter, I saw a bunch of moons around the planets. Again, this is not something I would do in the city.

And I'm most proud of going hiking—and this actually happened after I graduated, so in the two years I was here, somehow I managed not to go hiking. I was ambushed one weekend while I was here—maybe I was a student. No, I don't think so. I was living on West Wheelock. My friends came, knocked on my door and told me we were going to Gile Mountain. It was great. It was a short, doable hike. And after that, my friends—they were all in Phi Tau at the time, they were outdoorsy. I think every one of them was outdoorsy, except for me.

We had planned a house trip to go to Nunnemacher Cabin, which has no electricity or running water. And so I decided, *If I'm going to do this, I might as well do this now while I'm still*

*physically capable* and while I had about ten friends who were outdoorsy, because if anyone is going to watch over me, it would be them. And so I went hiking up to Nunnemacher with a group of friends from Phi Tau. And I survived.

DONIN: [Laughs.] Well, since then, have you become more outdoorsy?

CHAU: I would say no. I am still very much fond of creature comforts, and I'm not sure [chuckles] I would go back to Nunnemacher for an overnight trip. As great as that was, I prefer the five-star hotel—

DONIN: [Laughs.]

CHAU: —in a city.

DONIN: Right. But you're glad you did it once, anyway, for the experience.

CHAU: I'm very glad I did it.

DONIN: Yes.

CHAU: It was a great experience. It's one of those things where the company matters just as much as the activity.

DONIN: Right, right. That's true of a lot of things here, I think. It's the people you're with.

CHAU: Yes.

DONIN: Okay, I think we're done.

CHAU: Thank you.

**[End of interview]**