

Nora Yasumura
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
November 6, 2013

DONIN: Today is Wednesday, November 6th, 2013. My name is Mary Donin, and I'm here in Rauner Library with Nora Yasumura. I was about to say Dartmouth Class of, but—[Laughs.] I'm so used to talking to students. Anyway, Nora's title—she had many titles—and you're gonna have to correct me, Nora—when you left here, you were working for the Dartmouth Health Connect, right?—for what, about a year?

YASUMURA: Right after I left here? Yes. Mhm.

DONIN: Right. But you came here initially as an assistant dean and adviser to Asian American students back in 1999 and then did amazing other things that we'll get into as well, but I just wanted to sort of get your first title in there.

YASUMURA: Sure. Actually, my very first title in the fall of '99 was called—I think it was called Asian and Pacific American programming liaison, and it was only part time.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And you were in the dean of the college office, right?

YASUMURA: Sort of. [Laughs.] It was kind of a mess, actually, when I first started as far as the organization. This was before the Office of Pluralism Leadership was created. I was involved in that creation. And so at the time, there were adviser positions to the gay/lesbian community, the Latino community. There was a class dean—they called them class deans back then. Sylvia Langford, who—

DONIN: Oh, yes.

YASUMURA: —helped out with the black community, but she was not in that formal position; it was an informal position. And of course there was the Native American Program, but that was separate, and the Center for Women and Gender, which actually was called something else then, too. And so it all

predated all that stuff, and we were the last kind of community of the different kind of ethnic, racial groups to get an adviser. And I think it was first advertised for 10 hours a week, and Holly Sateia [pronounced sey-TAY], who was the dean of student life at the time—she had really advocated and really said, you know, “I can’t find anybody for just 10 hours.” But it was programming liaison, I think, historically because that was what was perceived was needed for the Pan-Asian community—the Asian, Asian-American community—was just somebody to help to do events.

Obviously, that evolved quite a bit, and I think there was more understanding, but it is a snapshot of kind of what people perceived the needs of this growing population of students of Asian and Asian-American descent, coming to Dartmouth. So I was really honored to be that first person in that position and then help to advocate for it to go full time as part of the Student Life Initiative—

DONIN: Oh, yes. President Wright.

YASUMURA: —of President Wright. [Laughs.] Exactly.

DONIN: So this was, you said, '99. That's right. He started in 1998.

YASUMURA: Yeah.

DONIN: So this was all part—I mean, the efforts of the dean of the college, who at that time—was that Jim Larimore then?

YASUMURA: Yes, Jim Larimore. Yeah. He had just started, I think, in that position then.

DONIN: Yeah. So this is a reflection of exactly what we're trying to document with this oral history project: how the face of Dartmouth literally (and figuratively) has changed so dramatically since the end of World War II. And we're not just talking about women. I mean, we're talking about the way that the student population and the faculty and the rest of the population of the community of Dartmouth has so dramatically changed and become more than just a bunch of white guys here.

YASUMURA: Yeah.

DONIN: And you're a reflection of that because they had to hire specialists—

YASUMURA: Right.

DONIN: —to do the programming for these various diverse groups that are on campus.

YASUMURA: Yeah.

DONIN: And is that a demand that grew from the students, themselves, or from the administration feeling that those populations needed their own programming?

YASUMURA: Sure, yeah. It's a great question. It really grew from the students, and unfortunately, I think there had been probably students who were coming, who were asking for these kinds of resources. But I think what really eventually allowed them to get this position that I was eventually hired for was a series of kind of, you know, bias incidents or campus incidents that were against Asians and Asian-Americans. There was a cartoon that was very highly offensive. And actually there was a hate crime where two different students were—you know, things were written on the door that were very racist and threatening, actually, in nature.

And there was actually a round table where Holly Sateia brought together faculty, staff who were here at the time—of course, I wasn't here—who were already engaged with the Pan Asian community and students. There were a number of organizations. I can't remember exactly right now, but I think probably about four or five of the larger student organizations had already been in existence, and they brought those leaders together and students together and kind of just heard what are the concerns. And there was just a laundry list. Actually, I always used it as kind of my—what I call—North Star for the Pan Asian community. I always really understood and respected those students. Some of them were alums that also were starting to kind of speak out, too, because they had fought—weren't getting a lot of traction, but I think that incident really helped to sort of say, "We've got to do something."

And so that round table kind of list—it talked about Asian-American studies, it talked about having an advisor, it talked about gaining more awareness about Asian and Asian-American issues at Dartmouth. Really showed how far back Dartmouth was at the time.

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: And it took me—You know, we didn't get through *all* those lists, but I stayed here partly because I wanted to see some of those things really get traction. And we grew up to almost 20 Asian and Asian-related student organizations. So, you know—

DONIN: Twenty?!

YASUMURA: Yeah! [Laughs.] Because we had dance troupes, we had performance groups, —

DONIN: Oh. Oh.

YASUMURA: —we had different cultural groups; we had, you know, political groups. We had lots of different types. I think that that's probably cut back a little bit, but at some points over time—and I always really felt like students should have choices and should have the ability—so there might be six different groups that were really focusing on China, for instance, or Chinese-American culture, and so there was definitely people who were interested in the language component of that, the religious component of that, the different intersections of identity. And, you know, so that was always kind of really interesting, too, to see that Dartmouth had evolved, where we weren't just sort of saying, "There's one Asian organization. You all have to get along, and you're all the same"—

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

YASUMURA: —“and that's all you get.”

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: So, yeah, that brought different kind of challenges for us to help people communicate and get along with each other and

not feel like they were fighting over resources. But I think overall, you know, that really enriched the community, and it was nice to see it grow. So I really had 12 years to be the first person in that position, to kind of watch the evolution, some of which was really positive, some of which was discouraging because we didn't get as much traction as I think we were all hoping.

But also what's more rewarding just in the snapshot of the Pan Asian community is to see those alums, you know, and stay in touch with them through Facebook and other kinds of social media, to see—many of them have continued in—either professionally or in their private time to be advocates for the Pan Asian community, to be social change agents through their lives.

And that's always something that I felt drove me, was—you know, it's wonderful to have them get back and make this community at Dartmouth better. At the same time, we are actually educating them to be leaders and professionals through their whole lives. So we didn't burn them out—[chuckles]—so that they said, "I don't want to work on these issues." Many of them continued to do that and be committed to that, and that's probably one of the things I'm most proud of to see in the Pan Asian community.

DONIN: Did it pull alums from the older classes back to Dartmouth when they saw how this was developing? I mean, who did not have that kind of support when they were here.

YASUMURA: We actually—it didn't pull them, but we found some of them, and we pulled them back [chuckles]. So in 2002 actually I called the Rauner Library, and I said—because at that point OPAL had been created, and we were then folded into—we had the Native American program as part of it—you know, the black community had an adviser. And they would pull—call the Rauner Library and say, "Pull the Native American students' file, and they'd get these big files from—of history for the black community—get these big histories.

So I called and said, "Can I get the one on the Asian American community?" "Uh, there is none."

DONIN: Ooh.

YASUMURA: There were—we were able to find some documents kind of related to AMES and DAMELL that the—which would be the different Asian-American studies language program and the academic side of it, which were interesting. I think maybe the newsletter was called *Orient Express*. I mean, it's really interesting to see—but we really couldn't find—I mean, there weren't a lot of archives, so we—a student and I—we started just going—we couldn't find—you know, of course we know who the first alum who's of Asian descent, quite a famous alum. But then there is really not a lot of other information about other influential Asian or Asian-American alums. And certainly we still don't—we couldn't find, actually, who was indeed the first Asian-American alum because the college didn't distinguish—again, it was just an identity that was really invisible.

So that was very telling. So we decided to do the first work with the Dartmouth Asian Pacific American Alumni Association (a mouthful), DAPAAA, which I think had been formed in the late '80s. And we contacted them and worked together to really help to bring back the first reunion. So we had alums from almost every decade to come and just talk a little snapshot.

One of them is Hoyt Zia '75; one who is Helen Zia, who is a very accomplished Asian-American social activist, and she was a journalist who broke the story on Vincent Chin, who—So anyway, he, in his own right, graduated in the late '70s or the mid '70s and he never looked back. He didn't really—he wasn't very interested. He didn't have a very positive experience as a Chinese-American person here. And he thinks that maybe there were three or four other, you know, Asian-Americans; a few international students that were here at the time.

And so he lives in Hawaii, and when he graduated—later, he founded the Asian-American Bar Association with a few others. I can't remember if it was just the San Francisco chapter or the broader—but he was quite influential in his own way and, again, continued to be involved in the Asian-American community.

So we found him in Hawaii and engaged him and brought him back, and he was on the board for DAPAAA for a number of years. So we were able to help reclaim some people, to reclaim their experiences.

DONIN: Yeah, yeah.

YASUMURA: But those are always really important, I think, because part of the history for the current students to remember—and I always really try to press on them, to them, help them see is that they stand on the shoulders of the people before them. So they get benefits today that people before them—who were those firsts who had to endure and go through? And they should think about how *they* will have—leave a legacy, no matter, in what ways they'd like.

And that was always, you know, this kind of idea of—For me, history and Dartmouth is about leaving your experience, leaving Dartmouth in a better position than the way you received it, but also being appreciative of those people who—many didn't see much change. It takes such a long time to make profound social change here.

I was lucky, towards the tail end of my time at Dartmouth, to have that kind of—again, that decade, that wisdom to look and say, “I know it's possible. I have seen things move.” And so, you know, I think I could be kind of a beacon of hope sometimes because when you are in it day in and day in out, it—

DONIN: It's hard to see it.

YASUMURA: Yeah. And students are here a relatively short period of time, so—yeah.

DONIN: So what impact do these programs for students of whatever particular group we're talking about—do you think that helps them feel that they belong more at Dartmouth, or does it sort of set them apart because they tend to migrate towards one another? I'm trying to picture the pros and cons of encouraging them to hang out with the people that look like them, so to speak.

YASUMURA: Sure. Yeah.

DONIN: How do you help them feel like they are really part of the fabric of Dartmouth?

YASUMURA: Sure, sure. Well, I think—So one of the things about me personally is that I'm a multi-racial person. So I—my father was Japanese-American. He was born and raised—but his family went through the internment camps of World War II, so I've kind of grown up with that legacy of knowing—You know, my mom's Caucasian, a German, Armenian background. And I grew up kind of in the regional New York area.

And I think for me—just kind of answering your questions, I think for me, having the privilege of just belonging to one has never been my experience, and I think what I've kind of chosen to do with that particular experience and identity was to—I think I got good at bringing different communities together. I played lacrosse. That was a very different community in college. But I was also, you know, really involved in that Asian, Asian-American community.

I went to the University of Vermont and I've always been kind of a contradiction to people because I have a very broad social identity and activities that I enjoyed. And they didn't always go together. And I think I really kind of brought that with me to Dartmouth, and that would be my first observation was that people really are on separate islands.

And one of the things that I probably am most proud of, contributing and bringing to Dartmouth, was this program called Diversity Peer Program, and part of how that came out was—Because I was only working part time, and Holly Sateia, who was my supervisor at the time, had said, you know, “We got this grant to bring people together to talk about sensitive topics, and we were wondering if you wanted to work a little bit on that.”

So I said, “Sure.” And so I ran it for a couple of months the way that the person before me had run it, which was just bring in a speaker and different students would go for an hour or two hours, and then that would be it. And I just said, ‘You know, this is a lot of money for bringing in a speaker for a couple of thousand dollars, which really doesn't have any

traction. Could I take that money, and could I run focus groups and come up with my own curriculum working with students, ground up, and really bring different people from all different walks of [life], backgrounds, from campus, together.”

And this was actually—I came in the fall of '99, so probably by the winter of 2000. By the summer of 2000, we had arranged ourselves to—that was the sophomore summer of the class of 2002. We ran different focus groups. We asked students from all different walks of life. I networked and met sports teams, Greek system—you know, houses and people, and we just asked them lots of open-ended questions about diversity.

And what we found was that students were very isolated, that there were students who were committed all over campus but didn't know how to approach these topics, didn't think they were welcome, that if you weren't an African-American student you didn't have a right to really talk about these issues.

And it was just a sad...I had also come as a counselor, 'cause I was working in the counseling field prior to that and could see how burnt out so many students were. And it was just sad to see how disconnected people were.

So we came up with basically this program, and we decided that the format needed to be going out—off campus for two days, to go on this intensive retreat. At the time, this was not popular. Now the Tucker Foundation—you know, the Rockefeller Center, the Dickey Center—everybody does that. But this was not popular. And people said, “Students will never do that. They would never give up their personal time.” I mean, the Internet was just—you know, Facebook wasn't even really invented. But even then, people said, “The students won't disconnect from campus. They won't take”—

And we had just a lot of good involvement right from the beginning. And because of, I think, the way we had done the focus groups, it came from the students. You had asked me, you know, “Where did these things come from?” Because it came from the students and I was just facilitating that, we

always, through the 12 years that I ran that program, we always had students from lots of different walks of life.

And so that was one way to really help to create structures, to give students the opportunity to really be vulnerable and real with each other. You know, one example would be, you know, an African-American student from Atlanta who really grew up in quite, you know, an impoverished kind of situation, had said, “I’m statistically not supposed to be at Dartmouth College.” You know, that kind of was *her* background.

And there was another student on that same retreat who had actually been involved in a very public hate incident on campus and who had really learned from that and had decided that this retreat would be a good way—and, with my encouragement, to apply for it and was accepted. And that particular student, who identified as white,—he said, you know, “I feel so guilty about the economic and kind of racial opportunities and privilege that I have.”

And, you know, it was great to see these two students sit together and after lots of great conversations, real conversations—you know, for the black student to say to the student, “I can’t afford for you to feel guilty and do nothing. I don’t need you to feel guilty. I just want you to take responsibility and appreciate what you have and look around and recognize not everybody does. That’s all I need.”

And it’s just a transformative moment, not just for those two people. When you do that with a group of 15 people, everybody is transformed. And there were many of those kinds of instances where—you know, where people really had real conversations: cry, laugh.

And we had students—you know, alums that said that because of those instances, they changed their major, they chose different classes. So we really saw that it impacted them. And it really showed me—I think the thing that people don’t understand, I think, always about Dartmouth and the students here—and you were sort of saying—you know, we were saying, prior to, students are just amazing here—is that if you give them the opportunity, they really can rise to it.

They were always thirsty for meaningful opportunities to connect with other people.

And I think part of that is because there still is this—seems to be a culture—it softened, but I think we're—so many students would feel the need to put masks on. Happens very quickly here, where they get kind of the idea that they're needing to perform for others. It didn't feel like people were competitive academically; they were competitive for themselves, I think. But there was this need to kind of put masks on and hide who they are.

And then if you layer that with sexuality or gender or religious diversity or other ability, class, race, obviously culture, it was even harder, but it wasn't just those social identity groups that were here later. I just think it's actually almost all students here that really struggle with needing help to really feel comfortable with being vulnerable and letting people get to really know them.

So I think programs like DPP—there are obviously other really great programs—these cultural groups or, you know, the Gay-Straight Alliance or, you know, different—Mosaic, which was the multiracial group—they gave students the opportunity to really explore parts of who they are with that vulnerability, to compare and contrast with each other.

So to me it wasn't either-or—like, should we have these cultural groups or should we—it was an end. I think we had to do all of it. That's why I had to write out all the things I did because I really felt to do the job well, you had to give people a lot of choices—some developmentally—some people really needed to find those cultural groups. We had students who had been adopted themselves, maybe of Korean descent but adopted to white parents. They needed to be involved and meet other people of Asian descent and interact. That was scary for them. Other people—it was a way to stay connected and not lose their language or their culture.

But, you know, again, it was nice to have all those choices.

DONIN:

It seems, from the students we've talked to during this project, so many of them—and this is just a different way of describing what you were just talking about, but so many of

them felt such enormous pressure to sort of fit in and figure out where they fit into this puzzle that is Dartmouth. And the pressure—you know, in addition to the academic pressure, which is huge, they've also got this tremendous social pressure to figure out, you know, *Who am I supposed to be here?* As you say, what mask do they have to put on?

YASUMURA: Yeah.

DONIN: And it was almost debilitating to some of them; it was easier to sort of hide away and not try to engage.

YASUMURA: Mm-hm.

DONIN: And you then layer on top of that this business of whether to be Greek or to be non-Greek,—

YASUMURA: Mm-hm.

DONIN: —and so many of them, it seems, ran away from the Greek thing because it just looked so overwhelmingly difficult to fit into that one-size-fits-all—

YASUMURA: Mm-hm.

DONIN: —social model.

YASUMURA: Yeah.

DONIN: So these efforts that you've made are huge here. But I wonder—is there any way to change the sort of—this is such a closed environment here. These kids are all locked in here in Hanover. Certainly the location has a big impact on that.

YASUMURA: Mm-hm.

DONIN: It's not like they can walk down Main Street and feel like they're getting away from Dartmouth and see people who look like them, 'cause you can't; you're stuck. It's everybody at Dartmouth.

So how do you think they've survived overall, getting through this? I mean, over your 12 years, has it gotten better? Because of all these programs you've started, do you feel

that the transition to this life here got better as the years went on?

YASUMURA: I think it definitely got better. I mean, I definitely feel like the climate has improved.

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: It doesn't go away, because what ends up happening is that we just unearth the things that have been under the table, which many people feel the bruises on their shins of that. What's troubling to me is they feel the bruises on their shins, and they tell people, and people smile at them and say, "I don't know what you're talking about," because they're not getting kicked on the shins, right?—whether that's administration, faculty, or their peers. And so they literally start to think that they're crazy, there's something wrong with them, they're part of the problem.

And that's the part I think that, at least for me, would be—When I left Dartmouth, I was honored that hundreds of people, you know, sent me letters, alums and current students, but what was really striking to me was the steady stream. You know, I accomplished and started many, many things at Dartmouth and I was very proud of those.

But that actually wasn't what people sort of said. Actually, what people said was—you just listened. And I didn't even try to—I think I learned, as a dean, as an adviser, that I didn't—it wasn't doing anybody justice by trying to cheer-lead them out of that. Of course, that's not really my nature anyway, but I just was a mirror of the truth-telling, of the challenge.

So the things—Towards the last couple of years, I really started to work with a couple other wonderful administrators, Giovanna Munafo—and we were involved—Jan Targan—we were involved in the Economic Equity Initiative, which actually predated—Really Jan and Giovanna brought people together to start to even just talk about issues of class. Very taboo at Dartmouth at the time.

Out of those talks and those workshops came the Hops Initiative—

DONIN: Hops.

YASUMURA: The Hopkins Center,—

DONIN: Oh, yeah, of course.

YASUMURA: —yeah, where they really talked about issues of class, which was very high profile, which was wonderful. And I, along with a couple of other people, started to really talk more about first-generation college student issues.

DONIN: That's another one that's on your list that you started, right?

YASUMURA: Yeah. And so—but part of that was because that population, along with a subset of that population, which our students who are undocumented who are here—were just completely invisible.

DONIN: Invisible.

YASUMURA: So they're getting knocked around under the table, and nobody is even recognizing—not nobody, but very few—as a whole, as a culture. There were many wonderful administrators and students who did notice and were trying to help. But for me at that point, I had a fair amount of positional influence—as somebody who'd been at Dartmouth for a while in an administrative position—to really provide some structure for those students to find each other. There were more and more faculty and staff who were here, including Jim Wright, who are first-gen, and so that they could start to meet and not feel that some of the experiences that they were having were not valid.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: So I think that, to me, seems like—The longer I was here, the more simple things like that became clear to me. Like, I was really trying to do all these complicated things, but I realized it really just came down to noticing and just really not trying to fix it, even for the students, but just validating for them, because many of these students—they have such inner strength and resilience.

I would sort of say to the first-gen students, and some of them were, again, undocumented. Some of them—they didn't know where the next, you know, kind of—if they were even gonna be able to enroll in classes the next term 'cause, you know, as one student said to me, "You know, I owe a hundred dollars. It might as well be a hundred thousand dollars. I don't have it." And they're stressing every day: *Can I even just enroll?*

And, you know, just by saying—so clearly there's been challenges in your life—like, "Tell me more." Be a good facilitator. "Just tell me more about what got—you've already jumped a ravine. What did you do to get there?" And then we'd start—I'd just listen, and they'd say, "Oh, well, I let people help me." You know, "I worked really hard." You know, all these different things. And I'd say, "Those are still within you. Don't lose that. That's what you need. You still need all of that."

We started talking more about this concept of resiliency, which is accepting the challenges which are facing you, not to cheer-lead past them, not to—you've got to work within them, and you don't have to do it alone. I think that was the other pieces that we really—

So that first-generation college student network resulted in—along with other initiatives—the FYSEP, which I know you've—

DONIN: FYSEP, yeah.

YASUMURA: Yeah. And so, again, you can sort of see a chain of reaction where—and that was another piece. In the beginning, I'd been hired to do programs, and I quickly assessed: If Dartmouth only does these quick [raps three times on the table], one-time things, it's too much of a revolving door. We've got to institutionalize. We've got to create structures that will allow for this kind of legacy, which Dartmouth is very good at. But it's not something that I think these newer populations had been doing as much.

So I think for me,—'cause my background was in counseling but actually in family systems, was to create systems, support systems as well as structures and just bring people

together, just—I like to use analogies, but, you know, again, the nervous system had to be kind of established, just communication lines. So Inter-Community Council, I-CC, was formed. Actually, they were inspired by the Pan-Asian Council, which I had created, which brought all these different Asian groups together to really have different groups—

And actually what was really wonderful was—It had some hard years, where it wasn't as functional, but I think the students started to really sort of say, "What about the students who are fighting for environmental justice?" People didn't see any connections between environmental issues and racial issues or sexual—you know, issues of sexuality or sexual orientation. They just didn't think they had anything to do with each other. But actually they really do.

And so they started—you know, "Let's get a representative from the Greek system." "WHAT?" You know. So, again, they started to ask for these things at the later—you know, somebody who's representing the athletes. Many of them were all these things. You know, "I'm involved in the Greek system. I'm involved in—you know, I'm an athlete, and I'm involved in the AAm"—you know, in the Afro-American Society.

And so, you know,—and, again, people—and this was always true, I think, actually, but it wasn't as public and it wasn't framed so that people could start to see we're not really against each other; we're kind of really all—there's a lot of people working towards this.

So I think that's kind of, I think, this idea of really validating and facilitating but also putting it in a structure, which kind of allows for it to be regenerative rather than like the community.

DONIN: Well, you need this network in existence that's going carry it forward from year to year.

YASUMURA: Yeah, absolutely. And actually I think one of the things I hope that Dartmouth continues is to support areas like the Dean of the College or the Office of Pluralism and Leadership because it actually is tremendously time

consuming [chuckles] to keep that going because of the revolving door of the D Plans.

DONIN: Absolutely.

YASUMURA: So I think that—I hope that the college understands that you really do need to invest in that. The students developmentally—they're wonderful, but because they're always moving and developmentally they need guidance through that, there's lots of places where that could maybe not be as unproductive. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: And also they leave after four years.

YASUMURA: Absolutely, yeah.

DONIN: So you've got to keep generating more support for it.

YASUMURA: Absolutely, yeah.

DONIN: So what sort of—how much influence does the umbrella of the top administration trickle down to impact this kind of work? I mean, so you've got these amazing programs in place and trying to keep the network alive. Is there any support that you need from the top? Is there an impact from who the leadership is?

YASUMURA: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I really only worked under two different presidents. I can certainly tell you a lot more because more of my time overlapped with President Wright.

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: President Wright, in my time—because, again, it was clear—like you had said, you know, in the fall of '99, the Student Life Initiative—I think it was a time where more of these populations were coming to the school, including international students. That was a fairly recent—we've had international students here, but the numbers of international students and the wide scope of international students is a fairly recent—meaning in maybe 10 years.

And so President Wright, I think, was a wonderful leader to set the tone of that, both in who he and Susan Wright are as

people. You know, I would see them in Collis Center, and they would stop me and know me by name.

But I think actually the most striking moment for me was telling them—it was after 9/11. I was in Collis Center in a meeting when that happened, where—you know, administrative meeting, and somebody ran in and said, you know, “There’s a plane that’s hit the Twin Towers,” and then I ran over to a different conference room where they had a TV and actually watched, you know, the —and I’m from New York, so it was quite emotional.

And we did. We had reports of any student who looked like they might be Muslim were having issues on campus. I have friends and people who were in the Indian community. Anybody who looked like they were perhaps a terrorist because—you know.

And so a lot of the south Asian community, Indian community were impacted by this. I had a student report—he was actually, at the time, captain of the soccer team and, you know, was a senior who had been in town and was harassed in a bathroom because he’s multiracial and he has—at the time he had a beard.

So it was stressful time. And, of course, the Muslim students here had been—felt, I think, quite marginalized already.

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: And they did not have an adviser. That was another part, helping to advocate for that position, which now exists through the Tucker Foundation. But at that time—and President Wright didn’t hesitate.

He called me because he knew that informally I had done a lot of work with both the south Asian community but also with the Muslim community here. And he said, “Can you help me? There’s some students and leaders, and I would like to meet with them.” And he just sat in his office, and he said, “I just want to check in with you, and I just want to let you know I am with you 110 percent.” And I’ll never forget it because it’s the kind of tone that you recognize as a genuineness. And there was just a genuineness that comes there.

I mean, also—you know, another moment for President Wright would be one of his convocation speeches around his own white privilege. You know, again, just open the door when you have leadership who paves that and starts to talk about it and, again, validates that this is something that our community needs to talk about.

So kind of going back to—these were powerful moments; moments forward, I think. And so, you know, having that genuine kind of tone and behind the curtain outreach—I think at a place like Dartmouth, where it's relatively small, people know and remember, and so—

DONIN: Has a real impact.

YASUMURA: He did. He did. I mean, he definitely did for me.

DONIN: And that's what—I think that was one of the hallmarks of his presidency, this effort to make sure everybody did feel that they belonged in this community,—

YASUMURA: Mm-hm.

DONIN: —just as you said. And, you know, he did have some challenges [chuckles] throughout his administration.

YASUMURA: Absolutely. Well, I think—You know, again, I think any good leader is willing to understand and appreciate that any kind of social change, change of culture or even—I never was invested in changing the culture. I think there's so many wonderful things about Dartmouth culture. I always kind of talked about—more about expanding.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: You know, again, there's room within our culture to be more inclusive of people. And we have to be willing to make some structural changes, sometimes to change and look at our traditions. You know, I worked—I actually led two DOC trips early, before I had my daughter. Actually, my daughter—we're gonna put this in the library—is I think probably the youngest tripee—

DONIN: [Laughs.] Perfect.

YASUMURA: —in the history of Dartmouth College because I was two weeks pregnant.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

YASUMURA: And so she—and her name is Midori, which means “green” in Japanese. And she spent a lot of time on this campus.

DONIN: That’s great.

YASUMURA: Yeah. So anyway, I led two DOC trips because I really wanted to understand—because it was clear to me that the first orientation is actually the DOC trips, the Dartmouth Outing Club trips. And many students involved in the Diversity Peer Program—we actually had—the student coordinators of that started coming to our retreats because they wanted to learn for themselves about how to be more inclusive. And so they were trying to figure out—I mean, early on, students would come to me and say, “We want to figure out how we can attract more African-American students to come.”

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: And I just—then, again, it’s complex. You’ve got to look at a lot of different things. You know, inclusion—often the messages that make people feel excluded are not the obvious ones. And so, again, I said, “Let’s run focus groups. Let’s ask them what are some of the barriers.” And they heard things like, you know, being out in the elements—

DONIN: Exactly.

YASUMURA: —and, you know, hair, or just lots of different things. You’ve already heard some stories about this.

DONIN: Oh, very intimidating.

YASUMURA: Yeah. Also the “rah-rah” masking culture really starts there. So students starting to share really meaningful things within the trip’s experience I think began to evolve over time. And, again,—so that social, cultural norming and expanding—not

getting to say, “We’re gonna take”—I mean, going outdoors with folks or even—again, it came to—‘cause at the time, I think, they didn’t even have the organic farm. They only had sort of the psycho hiking or—they didn’t have, like, nature photography. And we said, “You know, you’re making a lot of assumptions that people already have exposure, and they want to do these things. What’s the goal here?”

You know, I think it evolved to get people to go in the outdoors, but it—or it was originally that, but it had evolved to people really feeling that they wanted to bring the community together and saying, you know, “I think then, you need to provide—think about what are some ways that you can provide a wider range of choices for people. Not everyone loves hiking or wants to do it or, you know, finds that fun.”
[Laughs.]

DONIN: So do they now—I mean, that shows you how little I know about the trips, but are there any sort of urban trips or art trips or whatever?

YASUMURA: They definitely have been evolving. I don’t know, ‘cause, again, I haven’t been doing them for a while, but, yeah, they definitely have trips that are more—actually stay here or—I think the first one that they tried after we were sort of pointing out that they might want to have—the population was changing; they may want to have different choices. There were ones like the organic farm and—

DONIN: There’s one that they talked about, cabin camping or something?

YASUMURA: Yeah, yeah.

DONIN: —where you were just—

YASUMURA: Yeah. So, like, nature photography. You go up to the Grant but you’re staying in a cabin and sleeping on a bed. It’s still rough, but it’s not that rough. And so they started to provide more opportunities for folks, and I think, you know, that definitely has been helpful.

So are things changing? I definitely think that there’s more expansion, but that just creates different moments to work

through. I think that level of sophistication as the issues didn't go away; they just came on top of the table. That's also a messy thing, right?

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: So we're talking about—you know, I certainly have followed enough around talking about things like sexual assault and, you know, different kinds of racial issues that—those are not really—unfortunately, those are not new. Again, they've been existing for a long, long time. It's—in my mind—it's progress that we're addressing them and hopefully learning from those.

It's the same thing about personal masks. What's sad to me is they get in the way of people really growing and gaining self-confidence and understanding. And to me, you know, as I recruit and help to encourage parents to send their kids here, I take it very seriously and always did with my job, to sort of feel like we become, as administrators, deans, ambassadors for these students, and we want to see them grow as much as possible.

And I think the reason why I spent time here is because I really did believe and I do believe that Dartmouth students and graduates—they all then have a very big sphere of influence. Whatever they decide to do in their lives, just by being able to have a degree from a place like Dartmouth—and what are ways that they can do that responsibly and to make an influence? The more that we can help them really get to know who they are and accept all those different aspects and learn about other people who are different than them, the better they're gonna be, the better they're gonna serve, I think, their degree and, obviously, our world.

And so, you know, I think that's productive, but it's messy.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: But I'm from New York. I'm not afraid of messy, a little messy.

DONIN: Right. [Laughs.]

- YASUMURA: I'm a New York Japanese-American girl. I like things messy, but we're all very nice about it. And to me, you know, I'm always asking sort of, "So what?" in the sense of, you know, we shouldn't just say these things are happening and complain about them. We've got to think about how can we be innovative and resourceful to work through them and continue to move?
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- YASUMURA: That's always been, I think... Something that was really important, is, again, to validate to the students and sort of say, "Okay, so what? What are we gonna do about that? I mean, are we gonna sit here and complain about it the whole time?"
- DONIN: Not productive.
- YASUMURA: "You know, we *can* do something, and actually you can learn a lot from it."
- DONIN: Mm-hm. So is that your response—I mean, would it have been your response when you were still here? These incidents keep happening, you know, that set everybody back. It sets the whole community back.
- YASUMURA: Yeah.
- DONIN: This business that took place at Dimensions last spring. You sort of shake your head whether you're a staff person or faculty or the students and say, "So where did that come from, and how is it still happening on campus?"
- YASUMURA: Mm-hm.
- DONIN: Not to mention, you know, the assaults that take place. Sometimes it's hard to help the students move forward after something like that 'cause it really does knock you backwards once again.
- YASUMURA: Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, I've had my own demons to wrestle here—being at Dartmouth for so long, I think probably—Oh, gosh, I'm gonna forget the year, maybe 2006 or something, when they had the incident where the

Dartmouth Review had put, “Indians are getting restless” or “Savages are getting restless” or something.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

YASUMURA: And there was a whole series of incidents that had built up to that. I mean—and those days were, I think, where I really questioned, *Why*—I mean, really, really questioned, *Why do I do this? Does it really matter? Will anything ever change here?* I mean, I really—I think anybody who worked close to me—saying—that was a rare moment for me.

What I realized, though, sometimes my job was actually to hold the line. We weren’t gonna—you know, we do tend, as a society, to see progress as movement forward, but sometimes it is just holding the line. And that was a big “aha” moment for me in the sense that this *is* a societal ill, and we’re all socialized to have a lot of these bias incidents that—you know, these biases and actions, and you put people in close proximity, and, again, we might see some people evolve past, but new people are constantly coming in, and it’s exhausting.

But this is happening out in communities wherever we are. It’s just, again—

DONIN: It’s not just Dartmouth.

YASUMURA: Yeah. And so I would then have been able to give this perspective, which is, you know, this is horrible, and we need to learn from this and grow from this, and you can see that many productive things often do come out of those moments. So I sort of see it as kind of a growth mindset. Like, *What are we gonna do?*

And we do everything we can avoid to do it, but we can’t really avoid it. It’s like getting the flu. I mean, I can wash my hands, I can try not to, but inevitably it’s going to happen. And I think I understood that that’s not really the marker of progress, whether they happen or not happen. That’s just a marker of our society overall, not just Dartmouth. What’s the marker of progress is what we do about those moments when they happen.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: That's really the test. And part of that is this very delicate art of, you know, did we—are we communicating in those moments? Are we working together? Are we supporting each other? Do we reach out like, you know, President Wright did? You know, it's those moments that show our moments of integrity.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: And that seemed better. But, you know, there's lots of—it's complicated. But I don't think that's a sign that we're not doing the right things and things aren't happening in good ways.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: Many—I mean, we did a whole—I was always big into assessment, and we asked the UGAs, the undergraduate advisers, you know, in the residence halls, to just gather some information of incidents, any incidents that happened. And we got back hundreds of things that never get reported. I mean, just the amount of stuff—those are—

So the other perspective was, from what we in OPAL or others would see or hear from students, those were only the ones that somehow made it public, but so many things didn't. What we know is when a culture or community allows—like, one of my biggest things, mantras in the Diversity Peer Program and otherwise: Silence is not mutual.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: You know, if you see something, we just really help the students. So that's one of—the Diversity Peer Program students became kind of ambassadors because they were in those informal moments. So we trained them to figure out how to—when an incident happened in the fraternity basement or in a residence hall, that they didn't stay silent, that they said something. They did something. It didn't mean it went public. It wasn't some big thing. But they didn't say, by looking away—it says, again, just going back to that thing

I was saying about under the table and not validating it, it says, “It doesn’t matter. I don’t care.”

And actually, when you pull those people aside, that’s not what they’re thinking. They would say, “I don’t know what to do.” If it happened in a place like a fraternity, they say, “Power dynamics got in the way.” Students would say, “If I say something, I could”—this is literally the words they say, is, “I would commit social suicide.”

So what we realized is we had to also address support. And I remember early on in the Diversity Peer Program, we had a student who wrote an article—So there had been an incident where a bunch of people apparently had done the “wah-hoo, wah-hoo” kind of thing to a Native American student, and the Native American students raised concerns about that, and it went into *The D*. You know, there was press on that. And then, of course, this woman got attacked for complaining about it. And there was a whole *D* thing going back and forth.

And then this DPP student, who was a white male student—he wrote an op-ed, and the first thing he said—as I’m reading, I’m, like, *Oh, he wrote an op-ed*. And it said something like—along the lines of, “I didn’t think it was a big deal, da-da da-da da.” And I was, like, *Oh, my goodness. That’s not what we...* [Laughs.] *I’m surprised that’s what he’s writing*. And then he said, “Because I’ve never had to think about these things, you know, ‘cause I’m a white male student, and I’ve never had to worry. Now I’m learning about other people’s experience and what it feels like when that’s your experience, that’s you’re identity that people are mocking.”

So this was pretty early on in this program, Diversity Peer Program starting, so we didn’t have as strong a network as we did later, where we had hundreds of students on campus that went through that program. But I pulled him aside, and I said, “I’m just—you know, that was a great article and really kind of grabbed your attention,” ‘cause he was really honest about it. And I said, “Would you have written that if you didn’t have this network of people?” And he said, “No way, because as soon as you write that op-ed, *you* become attacked.”

DONIN: So he was ready because of the—

YASUMURA: So he was ready because he felt he had the support. So these are the—I think we have to kind of really name things like—The power dynamics really exist, and we have to kind of, again, create those networks, talk about these tough issues. I think there are so many wonderful students who want to learn and grow and help. I met more of those students than not.

I think we all have to recognize that they come in many different forms, and we have to reach out, find them, bring them together. But it's tough—those incidents—they just take—they take a part of your soul. [Chuckles.] I feel like I probably lost at least a year dealing with incidents throughout the 12 years of my life. You know what I mean? Like, collectively. After the incident with President Kim, I lost 10 days of my life I'll never get back. [Chuckles.] I mean, I had press and alums calling me from Korea. I had students live blogging about forums that we had. It was a whole interesting piece to be part of that.

DONIN: Yeah. I forgot. Of course, you were here when he arrived. That must have been a great shot of adrenaline for the Pan Asian community.

YASUMURA: Yeah. One of the things I remember when I got interviewed here—They said, you know, “How would you know that you've been successful if you were hired?” or something, “in the Pan Asian community?” And I said, “Well, I know, just looking around the campus,—and I think when I see one of the names on the buildings or the portraits in the Baker Library, has a person of Asian descent, then we'll know that Asian-Americans mean something to this campus,” or something like that. You know, I didn't know much about Dartmouth then. But who did I ever know that—One of the actual presidents! So it was quite a surprise when that happened as well. But we didn't—I didn't overlap with him too much.

DONIN: Mm-hm. Well, I think we've covered it. We get the picture. Have we left anything out of your amazing accomplishments here, from your chart?

YASUMURA: If I can just say briefly about some—just a few things about the Office of Pluralism and Leadership.

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: ‘Cause, again, probably really only Pam Misener who was the LGBT adviser—who’s also retired and left the campus—and I are the only people who really saw the—before OPAL and now after. And, of course, OPAL has even continued to evolve, even since I’ve left. But I think—the things I wanted to say about that, I think—which is it took—again, back to President Wright—and I think, you know, Jim Larimore, Holly Sateia, folks who really had the vision to really take these different parts of—kind of basically, you know, parts of people’s social identities or kind of groups and bring us together was very progressive at the time. Most colleges just had one or two people in a multicultural office.

And I think, you know, the ability—It was not always easy because there were blending histories. But I think that is actually very historic and fairly rare in the nation, to have an office like the Office of Pluralism and Leadership, and also to raise the bar, to really ask us to work collaboratively and to really kind of look at these broader issues of social equity, social identities and to actually encourage us to not just work with some sub-communities but actually encourage us to work with the whole campus.

You know, I think those were things that were really important to me, that I was really proud to be part of, the creation of that.

DONIN: So just for the record here, what was—When you started out, what was the mission of OPAL?

YASUMURA: When OPAL was first created?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: I don’t know, actually if it had a very long mission. I think what it really—I think that really was—At first, we were kind of different parts of the campus that already existed coming together and to just be like a hub of talking about different issues, whether it was Native American issues or LGBT

(gay, lesbian and bisexual) issues or, you know, Latino, Latina issues, black community. So really in the beginning, we were just kind of—

DONIN: Trying to pull this—

YASUMURA: —coming together.

DONIN: Okay.

YASUMURA: I think we tried to really evolve to be something that was really an entity that became a resource for the campus and for individual students, for some specific communities but also for this larger, I think, accountability. Sometimes I would just recognize that just being at the table was really helpful for, as you said, some of these populations to be seen and heard and validated.

So that just—and there were years with budget cuts and things of that sort. There was lots of talk about getting rid of OPAL or, you know, there definitely have been sort of political forces in that way.

DONIN: Yep.

YASUMURA: So just from a historical standpoint, who knows what will happen?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: I believe that change is good, and adapting and evolving and—you know, I think that's all—we shouldn't be invested in one thing.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: OPAL and others need to evolve with the times as well. But I did want to say I think that in many ways OPAL has played a powerful—from my perspective—a powerful part of the campus. And I think not just, you know, me in particular, but the whole entity that I think is worth talking about and saying as well, so—

- DONIN: So OPAL, then, offers help to students, individual students, but you also do programming, campus-wide programming.
- YASUMURA: Mm-hm. Yeah. So we were sort of set up—you know that we had assigned populations.
- DONIN: Yep.
- YASUMURA: So mine was working with the Pan Asian community; students who are Asian or Asian-American descent or who are interested in that topic. And so part of that is to help the student groups and others do, you know, lots of events, and the Pan Asian community did 300 events collectively, probably, a year,—
- DONIN: Wow.
- YASUMURA: —some of them very large—you know, anywhere from 100 to—the Devali kind of event has evolved into work with the Upper Valley community to become a 400-people event, you know, not including what they do on the Dartmouth Green. So, you know, I wouldn't do all those, but helping to facilitate that.
- And the burnout level of people, you know, of particularly some of the students who feel the burden of educating others of their cultural background, their abilities to not burn out—you know, obviously have academic trouble because they're putting so much time into these productions.
- DONIN: Yep.
- YASUMURA: There is sometimes behind-the-curtain kind of piece around it. It's really important to even helping them graduate.
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- YASUMURA: And so—yeah, we did a lot of events, as well as working with orientation kinds of events to, you know, alums. I mean, we worked closely with the admissions office—I mean, the whole life cycle of Dartmouth, you know, from recruiting—
- DONIN: All the way through—

YASUMURA: All the way through to staying engaged with alums, you know. So it really is the full life cycle that we're working with because that's just kind of the nature of the work, is that communities... And then for some of us, the hub of the Upper Valley community, the south Asian community. Just thinking of Devali, you know, again, brought together different leaders within both the Upper Valley as some of the companies were starting to recruit families here and individuals from India. We saw, you know, more of an increase in that.

DONIN: Well, I mean, just at the hospital alone.

YASUMURA: Yeah.

DONIN: A huge population.

YASUMURA: And the hospital, too, was, I think—But I think there was just one company in particular early on, and, you know, more people were coming here, and they did not have a Hindu temple. And, you know, we didn't have a big Devali celebration. After 9/11, actually, some of them were having trouble finding places that people would rent to them for halls and stuff, so we said, "Let's do it together." And we started that; we started doing these larger community and student events.

Shanti was created, and then that helped to advocate for the Hindu temple to be created and Prasad Jayanti from the Dartmouth side, a Dartmouth professor, computer science professor, was—is currently and has been probably the most influential person in that.

And Sonal Kumar was one of the first community members—who works at the hospital now—but who really had taken some leadership. And, you know, it was just really wonderful to see what that's grown into.

But, again, Dartmouth and many times we, the advisers—we had to be the hub. I mean, the amount of transnational adoptee families in the area—The student groups did these Big Sib/Little Sib programs, and we were the hub. Dartmouth has got a responsibility in this area, so the advisers often feel the pull of being not just for the students but we also

have community members that rely and look to Dartmouth to provide resources and enrichment.

DONIN: No wonder you were spread so thin.

YASUMURA: [Laughs.]

DONIN: I mean OPAL.

YASUMURA: Yeah, OPAL, yeah. So it's very hard because it's not a kind of thing where it's—partly we're so busy to kind of promote all that, but it's very much behind-the-curtain kind of work.

DONIN: Yeah.

YASUMURA: And so it's nice that you're providing opportunity—That's why I just wanted to sort of make sure that that doesn't get lost in the history because it's easy, you know, to get lost. I think we are all often humble people who didn't want to necessarily take all the credit because we weren't—I mean, I didn't—definitely didn't—I accomplished a lot, but none of it I did by myself. It was just an army full of people.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: And that is, I think, you know, what's beautiful about it, actually. That's why many of these things have continued.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

YASUMURA: But I think, you know, as a whole, from my standpoint—like, anything, if we do take things for granted, then they get lost, and then we have to restart. So I hope that Dartmouth will continue to see that those kinds of positions are really valuable, at least at this time in history. We'll see.

DONIN: Well, given the blossoming of the diversity on this campus over the last 10 or 15 years,—well, really since World War II, but it's becoming so evident now—I can't imagine that the demand for everything that OPAL does, the services that they provide and the support they provide is ever gonna be diminished. I mean, the demand is going to be there for a long time.

- YASUMURA: Yeah. Well, again—I think as facilitators, not the doers of things—
- DONIN: No.
- YASUMURA: The role or the purpose perhaps will just evolve to be slightly different, but, still, I think, very relevant.
- DONIN: Yep.
- YASUMURA: A lot of people said, “Well, there’s a lot of Pan Asian students here.” We have students of Asian descent in higher numbers than when I first started. I think it was, like, 10 percent, and now, if you include international students, it’s probably—I don’t want to say publicly—I don’t know exactly, but it’s probably 20 to 30 percent. It’s grown significantly—yeah, at least 30 percent, I think now, if you include international students, and—
- DONIN: And faculty.
- YASUMURA: Right. And so it’s just like women. You know, “Oh, you have a lot of women here now. We don’t have to worry about it.” Well, it just causes different—there’s just different challenges, right?
- DONIN: Yeah.
- YASUMURA: And so it’s not just always about numbers, but that’s often something we’ll hear is, you know, “What do you have to complain about now? You have more people.”
- DONIN: [Chuckles wryly.] Right.
- YASUMURA: And that just—For us it was sort of like, “Okay, but we have more people to manage and things to work through,” so—
- DONIN: Right.
- YASUMURA: Yeah. But it’s been fun. Thank you so much for inviting me. I’m glad to participate in this.
- DONIN: Oh, yes, I’m so glad we got you. And thank you for coming all the way in from Canaan.

YASUMURA: [Chuckles.] You're welcome.

DONIN: I'm going to turn this off.

[End of interview]