

Oral History Transcript

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Narrator: Alma Karina Miranda-Rodriguez (born 2003 -)
Interviewer(s): Isabella Emanuele
Elizabeth Reed
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Alma: Excuse me. [laughs] Sorry.

Bella: [laughs] Alright. Hello, my name is Bella Emanuele, and today is October 31, 2024. It's Halloween, so happy Halloween, everyone. My partner is Elizabeth Reed, and we are going to be conducting this interview in the Meriam Library Podcast Studio in Chico, California, and we're here with Alma Carina Miranda-Rodriguez.

Alma: Hey.

Bella: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this oral history project. We want to remind you that this may be published as part of the Preserving Chico State Voices for Change, which will be housed in the library. And this project is aiming to narrate and archive the history of community activism for Chico State, and we just want to get verbal confirmation that we have your permission to publish this transcript or all of it and its eternity. [laughs]

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: Okay.

Alma: I was so close to just say, absolutely not. [Bella laughs] Yeah, you do.

Bella: Okay. Awesome. So, we wanted to start with a little bit of just background about you. Wanted you to tell us a little bit about yourself more specifically, like, what are the majors, minors and the certificates that you're going for right now at Chico State.

Alma: For sure. Okay. So, like Bella said, my name is Alma Karina Miranda-Rodriguez, like ten other names after that. I am a first-generation student here in Chico State. I am going for my bachelor's degree in arts and humanities for English Creative Writing, as well for my bachelor's degree in science for Computer Engineering. My minor is Computer Science, and then I am doing a certificate in LEAP, which is editing and publishing in literary magazines.

Bella: Awesome. All right. Why exactly did you decide to come to Chico State? If it was a choice.

Alma: So, COVID happened, and I really wanted to go to New York City or Columbia University for fashion design.

Bella: Yeah.

Alma: And COVID happened. So that kind of threw my plans out the window. I also was going to try to apply for Oxford in the UK. Yeah, UK. But because of, like, how uncertain everything was in the world during the peak of COVID, I just chose to stay home. It would be a lot easier for me, rent wise, money wise. Also, just like my support system is here. So, it was also one of the only few colleges that actually accepted me.

Bella: Mm hmm.

Alma: And I kind of coasted through my first two years here in Chico State of like, being undeclared and changing my major so many times before I like stuck to what I'm doing now. I also, like, have my family members are here and have lived in this area for generations. One of my cousins is a professor here in Chico State. His name is Joshua Miranda. Shout out. [Alma and Bella laugh] And I had one other cousin graduate, and I think an uncle from Chico State. Other than that, everyone either didn't go to college or left Chico for a university. And there wasn't really a lot of people in my family that stayed in Chico for college or their bachelor's degree that I can remember or am close to. A lot of them either did it through like Butte College and then transfer out to a different college. I know a few of them did come back to Chico State to finish a degree, but a lot of them were just like transfer out.

Bella: Awesome. Okay, I also wanted to ask you a little bit about your background, like about your childhood and your ethnic identity. What would you say is your ethnic identity?

Alma: My ethnic identity, I say, is Chicana. I identify as a Mexican American woman here in Chico State. Chico State... [Alma and Bella laugh] ...here in the United States. I also identify as a queer woman. So, it is a really awkward... [laughs] ...which is so funny 'cause this morning, I just had this conversation with one of my friends in MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement], Sam. We, or they were asking me the difference of what I think is race and ethnicity. A lot of times, race is usually just what you're perceived as. I pass [as white], so even though I'm Mexican American, and I am, I don't live in a world where I am treated like a white woman, I still am able to pass with a lot of the same privileges of not being afraid of getting killed by a police officer or being shouted at and marginalized. I still go through racism, it's just very different than people who are darker than me or lighter than me. So, I live in this weird limbo, where sometimes people will first see me as non-Brown. And then when they hear me speak, all the prejudice they have of my community kind of starts to come out and, or they would make fun of me. And there's sometimes where, that's the first thing they see, they see a Mexican woman and they start letting their true color show. And in that, we were talking about how when we are doing our census, what is it that I have to put? And this is also like a really big conversation around other people in my community and my own family members that we say that we're white because that is our race. But ethnically, we usually just say it's Hispanic or Latino because of, just like how our culture was raised. We're not raised in a community where, like, certain things are done. Like, what my community does is really different than my friend Sam or you [Bella Emanuele] or Donovan [Donovan Ty] or Porter [William Porter Fox-Rolapp] or Danny [Daniel]. Although Danny and I, our friend, we have a very similar cultural background, I mean, he's also a Mexican man. It's just how we are perceived versus how we identify and what our culture, how we grew up.

Bella: Mm hm. Awesome. Thank you. So, I wanted to ask you kind of on that note, how exactly has or does your identity as a Chicana shaped your education and also, like, at Chico State specifically played a role?

Alma: I think it has. So, growing up, I grew up very sheltered. There is this really big difference between being a Northern Californian Latino and Latina versus a Southern Californian Latinx person just because culturally and geographically, there's differences. Although, yeah, we have, like same

languages, same practices, what we grew up with, movies, but it's also like the way we speak and the way we move around the world is very different. I mean, if you're from San Diego?

Bella: Mm hm.

Alma: So, San Diego and Chico are two completely different places. [Bella laughs] So that was probably, like, a culture shock of, like, how people's mannerisms here in Chico is so vastly different than Chi...um Chicago [shakes head]. [Alma and Bella laugh] Then San Diego. So, I grew up very sheltered in the fact that I only listened to, like, Telemundo's News [television broadcasting company] or Rojo Vivo, which is very biased, and it's very focused only in Latin America. [Elizabeth lowers Alma's mic volume slightly] Sorry, really loud. Further. Really.

Elizabeth: [in background] You're just really close. [laughs]

Alma: Further. [laughs] So when I grew up, like, the news for me was very much focused only on Mexico and Latin America. So that's the only education I really had, or I had a grasp of the world. So, I, you know, I'm ashamed to say that I didn't really understand the gravity of, like, racism. And I didn't understand that because, me growing up wanting to look white, having blue eyes, wishing my name was not Alma, and wishing my hair was not brown or curly was the fact that my environment and where I am is a very predominantly white. And because I don't look like them, or my peers, I was starting to compare myself. It didn't take until high school, where I had very radical teachers who strive for us to really question things. And it also took my dad having to leave to get his papers. So, this was Obama's last term of presidency. If I remember correctly, it was, like, it was like 11:00 P.M, it was a school night. I just remember being extremely happy that I get to stay pass up my bedtime, and Obama said something along the lines that those who have been caught by immigration now have a chance to try to get their green card. And that was when I was in third grade. So, we took my dad to the border, and since then, like, I lived back and forth. I would travel back and forth from Mexico to the United States. So even then my education on, like, what was going on was still very minimal. And I didn't understand what was going on. Now that I'm in college and I've been taking classes and high school, plus with the whole COVID and the Black Lives Matter, it like really opened my eyes to understand what was really going on and what I experienced was not the same as my white peers, my Black peers, my Asian peers, even my own cousins. So having my teacher for Econ in high school, Ms. North [Evita North at Inspire: School of Arts & Sciences in Chico, CA] and DLT [Marysol De La Torre-Escobedo at Inspire: School of Arts & Sciences in Chico, CA]. We had, like, really, and of course, Mr. Bishop, but he was back in eighth grade. Those teachers were really monumental for me to understand and push me into activism. Without them, I don't think I would be where I am now and, like, being so hard on my values and always checking myself, as well as learning. I don't want to be stagnant. So, from them, I was able to really understand, like the gravity of everything. I mean, I learned about Emmett Till through Mr. Bishop. And even now in Dr. Loya's [Dr. Ayde Enriquez-Loya, Associate Professor in English Department] class, in our cultural rhetoric, we're learning about how even research is very predominantly white and is only focused on isolation from the subject instead of learning and trying to push away and fight against what is the normality of academia, which is made for white cis het men [white, cisgender, heterosexual men]. That has definitely shaped how I moved through Chico State. I have now more, I question more everything that is taught to me, even from white professors,

and like the norm of what a classroom is, what we're learning. I've been very fortunate to have professors that push us to question things. Our freshman year, Dr. Joshua [Joshuah Whittinghill, Lecturer in Multicultural & Gender Studies].

Bella: Mm hmm.

Alma: He, white man, but also very radical, and he like, even asked us to, like, you know, question things, like, start thinking outside the box, like, why is this the norm? We had, like, very intense conversations about gender norms, like how in the beginning, pink was a very masculine color and blue was a very feminine color. We were also talking about... What did we talk about? [Bella laughs] We focused, at least, like, with the Toy Story movie. What was it? Toy Story Two or Toy Story Three that we watched in class?

Bella: Oh, yeah.

Alma: About how, a lot of the...that movie had a lot of like, similarities to what we're learning in class. So, I think that definitely like, shapes also just the way I move around Chico State, 'cause right now I'm working at a Hispanic and Latinx center called El Centro here in Chico State in the Meriam Library room 161. Hopefully, it's still there when I graduate. It is supposed to be a steady space for our community to find a home away from home. Being a first-generation student, it's really hard. A lot of times we don't have the resources on hand to really get help, and we end up dropping out. I mean, my first year, I was gonna drop out by the second month of my first semester. I felt so alone. I didn't get out of my shell. I could not for the life of me make friends. Granted, I was also living at home...

Bella: Yeah. [laughs]

Alma: ...so I feel like that was also, like, one of the reasons why it was really difficult because I wasn't in the dorms, and I feel like that's where a lot of, like, clicks started happening and then you start to meet people. However, that space that I found, which was formerly known as the Star center, became my second home and my hub to really learn about different resources on campus, get my homework done, have food whenever I needed it, and then head home to, like, where my support system is. So having that space now made for our different communities here in Chico State is like it's really important because it can share with our communities, not just Hispanics, but like everyone, because these centers are for everyone. They are to highlight certain communities, but we want them to be there for people to go in and learn and want to, like, feel at home and make friends and make connections. Without them, I feel like Chico [State] would not have as much of a Hispanic student body. We are historically a white school, but we do have more Hispanics here than any other ethnicities and race of students. So, I feel like being a Chicana woman going through Chico State has, like, really forced me to take a step back and realize that this is an accomplishment. Now everyone has an opportunity, and everyone has a privilege to be in a space where I'm not welcomed. I mean, historically, university are for straight white men who come from money. So, it's an accomplishment for me even to be here. And I'm able to also fight back when something happens. I've been through situations here in Chico State where, like, I've been in the tor- in the library where I had a student, two white students turned to a Brown, I think he was Hispanic, but I don't remember. This was last semester. I didn't even know the guy. They turned to him, and they called him a slur, and it just caught me off guard. I didn't know if they were friends or not, but I just remembered, I just felt

so unsafe. And I couldn't, like I couldn't speak out. A lot of times I'm able to speak out, but, like, for my safety, I was in an elevator full of men. So, I went to the center, and I just broke down and we were able to report it. And sadly, this still happens a lot in Chico State, but I am now able to feel more comfortable speaking out about it and calling people out as well when I hear, like, "hey, you're not, that's not okay" and "one, you're incorrect", like, "that's not politically correct to say, but let me explain why".

Bella: Yeah. Awesome. Oh, I wanted, that's actually, that's a really impactful story. I didn't know that happened to you. But I wanted to ask, you kind of mentioned it before, but I love the story of how you got involved in El Centro. And what exactly do you do? Like, what is your job? What do you often do in that office?

Alma: Yeah, so my job is to be a culture program coordinator. So, I make events like right now, for the month of October, I wanted to have Fridays be a day that students can relax and watch movies. Although, granted, Fridays are kind of awkward because a lot of students don't really have classes on Friday, so they just go home. And I work from 9:00 A.M. to 12:30 P.M., so we close early for our meetings, our staff meetings. And I make small events or sometimes even big ones too, for students to come in and use our center. The more students we get, the more funding we get, and we are funded by AS [Associated Students]. So, we've been really grinding and pushing out events. Our biggest one was last week...two weeks ago, October 16, we had our Unity celebration. We wanted to highlight community members here in Chico State of Latinx origins. So, we highlighted a student, a professor, and a student organization. Our winners was Daisy [Daisy Rolan Salcedo], Berto [Humberto Partida], and LTC, Latinos in Technical Career. We wanted to highlight them for not only, like, making waves for our community, but also just highlighting the fact that "Hey, we're here and we're proud and we're going to stay and we're going to make noise". That was a very stressful event to do because we had to get food. We had to figure out how we wanted to decorate the space. We wanted to actually see who was going to get nominated. We needed a speaker for our event. So that was a more intense one. Then we also...we collaborate with other organizations, like, next month, November, on the 19th, I'm collaborating with CalFresh for Homeless and Hunger Awareness Week. So, we're going to have a meet and greet to get to know CalFresh, that, "Hey, CalFresh is in here". We also, today, 'cause today's Halloween, we did cupcake decorating, and we put on a scary movie. [Bella laughs] And next month, hopefully, instead of doing movies on Fridays, I'm going to do Telenovelas Tuesdays. So, Tuesday, I'm going to start putting telenovelas on in our center. I'm thinking, hopefully, from 3:00 P.M. to closing, just so, like, it feels like we're at home and people can come in and just, like, relax. So sometimes there are more academic based events, or other times, it could be very fun and cozy events that you're just like, "Oh, I'm just here to study. I just want to relax".

Bella: Also, I was going to ask you about events, but that's... [Alma and Bella laugh] Because I had been seeing some of the signs...

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: ...that you guys have out. And I thought they're really interesting. And I wanted, kind of on that point, I've noticed with a lot of those signs, that you guys intentionally are using Spanish instead

of English. If you wanted to elaborate a little bit more on exactly the intention behind using Spanish over English, especially like you said, on a campus that is predominantly white.

Alma: Yeah, so we know that a lot of first-generation students and a lot of Hispanic students come from homes that our first language is Spanish. My first language was both Spanish and English. And I grew up talking that language simultaneously. So, we wanted to create... we wanted to make it accessible for students who still, although they speak English, they're more comfortable reading in Spanish or speaking in Spanish, so that they could also feel included, like, "Hey, we see you". Like, this is an event for everyone. So having that, it's an inclusivity to not only highlight our first generation students, but we also have students here in college that are older, who could be our aunts, uncles, grandparents, or parents, who only speak one language. And if we could make it easier for them to navigate this new world, it's a plus. That's why we try to also put an accommodation. At the bottom of every [one] of our posts or every [one] of our flyers, you're going to see accommodations for disability. We put that on all of them just so that if they need, like a space to put in a wheelchair or they can't read certain things or they need an interpreter, we could go out of our way and actually get that for them, get that source and that resource for them so they can actually be included.

Bella: That's awesome. Um, I also want to talk about something that you've already kind of mentioned. The question exactly is, as a woman of color, fighting for representation on campus, how has the culture at Chico State either helped or, I'm assuming in a lot of cases, hindered your ability to advocate for yourself and others. You already mentioned the incident that happened in the elevator. But as a whole, do you feel like that type of language and attitude is very emblematic of Chico State and has played a large role?

Alma: Yes. It's a give and take sometimes. There's some days I really do feel like I'm seen here on campus. Other times, I just feel like I'm not, I don't belong. Like I said, coming here in my first, like, two years at Chico State. Um, girl, actually since I think, this is the first semester I really do feel like I'm being seen. The resources were not available. That's one thing, like Chico State prides itself for having TRIO, REACH and MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement] for engineering students who are of color and who are vets [veterans], as well as first generation or low income. A lot of times it's not advertised correctly, or there's just so much need for it that it gets full. I had to navigate Chico State by myself, so I would come home crying every day. And I still cry. I mean, its college, college is hard, and I'm also a STEM girl, so [laughs], and humanities. I still go to my mom and just bawl like, "I'm gonna to drop out. I don't want to do this anymore", and she's like, "Take a break. Go take a nap. Come back. And let's do it again". And I'm like, "You're so right. I'm a bad bitch. Let me just continue". [Alma and Bella laugh] But like I said, those first few, like, 4...5 semesters. Chico State was so hard. I genuinely could not find any help. I couldn't even afford college. The thing that saved me was Biden's stimulus check for COVID. [Alma and Bella laugh] Those first two years, like, that really was... if I didn't get those, I would not be able to afford college. And that's what's really hard. There's the scholarships here in Chico State, but that's so hard to even get, and people say, well, you should still apply because you might get something. The reality is no. I was talking to other students here in Chico State and a student... an alumni, Autumn. They... What did she say? She told me that she didn't even get the Chico State scholarship at all until she became an AS President

[Associated Students President]. Like, that's so discouraging, and it just feels awful because I'm a part of so many clubs. I'm like, I'm going out of my way to be even just a part of the community, but I can't afford college or there's no help, and don't get me wrong, CalFresh is out there, but I'm still living with my parents, and I'm very grateful for that. But it's like, I still struggle. I still have to be very mindful where my money is going. And like I said there's some days, like where something horrific would happen, and I just don't feel like I can report it because nothing's going to happen, like with the whole elevator situation. Yeah, we reported it, but I know those two guys are out there still. Like, nothing happened to them. I mean, what was it like a couple of weeks ago? We had that Bible dude.

Bella: Oh! Mm hm.

Alma: And yeah [laughs], so that was great. And the thing is, it's not that we didn't want to kick them out. It's the fact that Chico State did want to kick him out. He just had to say the right word before we could kick him out. He had to threaten a specific student, or he had to say a certain way or, like, phrase a certain thing. So, he was smart about it so he would not get kicked out. And the thing is, like Chico State tells him beforehand, like, "Hey, like, you do have the right of freedom of speech here, but there's certain things you cannot say on campus, before we have to kick you out". So, I think although Chico State prides itself on being very inclusive, yeah, I mean, we have amazing events. I mean, thankfully, we're able to celebrate a Latinx Independence Day and Independence Day was September 19. We brought a Banda. We had a big party in front of Sylvester's. We were dancing, that was amazing. Then the BRC, the Black Resource Center had their opening, their grand opening. That was amazing. I think they're still going to have their block party at some point, either this coming up month or next semester. And then we still are waiting for APIDA [Asian Pacific Islander and Desi American] to get their center. So there are times where, like, yeah, Chico State highlights our community, but there's also times where it's lacking where Chico State should really step up and make it a safe space, where I mean, I have my own friend who is a Black man, and he already got stopped a couple of times by the police asking him, like, "why are you here?". Like, okay [?] When I first got hired by the center, we had to go listen to President Perez speak. At Laxson, and the Mayor of Chico was extremely happy to say that Chico finally has enough police that meets the quota. Like, okay, that just means that you're going to be policing certain communities more often and making it illegal to camp in certain spots on Chico. Like, I understand, we want to keep our community safe, but there's ways about it, cause sadly, I mean, the reality is we have a lot of violent people here, not just police, but, like, just community members are also really violent and specifically to certain people of color and certain communities. I mean, Chico historically is a sundown town. We were a sundown town for the Asian Americans during the Gold Rush. And Oroville was one of the largest KKK places in the United States, which is crazy. I mean, fricking Oroville. But, you know, it makes sense. [Alma and Bella laugh] So, yeah, there's, like, there are some times I just feel so proud to be a woman of color and, like, a Mexican here. And like I'm able to just, like, be unapologetically myself. But then there's some times where I'm in a classroom full of white men or just white women. And there's only one other person of color there. And it's just, it's a fear of, like, what are they thinking about me? What are they saying about me? What, am I in danger? Even when I'm walking down the street, it's always that thing in the back of my head,

where it sucks, but there are places to improve where the outreach is to educate. The videos that we get, like, semester, I think it's every semester we get, like, sexual assault prevention or, like, alcohol prevention. Let's be honest, a lot of times people just run through them. [Bella laughs] I mean, yeah, there's some nice, like, it's a really great thing to educate. But, like, we're human. We're like busy college students. It's an amazing thing for Chico State to be putting out those videos and those PSAs. However, let's be honest, not many people are actually sitting down and reading them and, like, really trying to grasp it unless you already are wanting to advocate and already are educated. I had an amazing professor, Dr. Lindsay. She is a human sexuality professor here in Chico State and she had this whole class about human sexuality. We were able to, look at porn sites. We looked at, like, different sex toys. We talked about how to properly, keep ourselves safe. We learned about disabled people in our community, how they're also sexually active. We talked about abortion rights. We looked at both sides. We looked at the positive of pro-life, and then the other side of, like, not pro-life. [Bella laughs] And then sorry. Did I say the positive of pro-life with you? Sorry. [Alma and Bella laugh] Let me rephrase that. We saw both, both arguments. We also had this big project where, like, try something that you don't think you would ever do, and for me, it was like, I went on a first date with some stranger. It was on a dating app. But she brought the story of, like, I think it was a couple of semesters ago where a frat house had a sign of something about, like, for freshman saying, like, specifically, that it was phrased for the parents of, like, um worry of, like, your daughter, like, coming to her house or something. It was implying sexual assault. And she called the police on them, I think, or she went there and took it down or she put it on her Facebook. And she has a reputation here. Like a lot of people who don't know her, usually say, like, she's a bad professor because she doesn't know how to keep her mouth shut or she's always putting us in trouble. Like, no bitch, what you're doing is unsafe. And it wasn't until the end of his graduation that he went up to that professor and said, "Hey, if it wasn't for me taking your class..." or he took a class, I don't think it was her class, but he told her, like, "Hey, you must hate me". She's like, "I don't hate you, but I'm here to educate you". So, like, yeah, she has a very strong personality, and a lot of times that is very intimidating, but at the same time, we're there to educate. And it wasn't for her, like, I mean, I don't think I would learn so much more about us and our human sexuality and just, like, how certain things are hereditary, certain things aren't, how to keep yourself safe, how to ask questions properly. And we were also talking about, like, reproductive, we learned how to check our breast for breast cancer. We literally saw a video of how men should check for testicular cancer and how to check for breast cancer on them as well, because men also get breast cancer. So that was, like, really amazing. I never, you know, learned how to check for lumps. I never thought of, like, telling my family members, like, "Hey, you guys should check for lumps, do you guys should check your guys' testes to, like, see, like, are you guys? Do you guys have something there that you're not used to? Like, that shouldn't be there". So, like, there are professors on campus that make me feel seen and have really helped me feel empowered to speak out about things that need to be spoken about. Even though it can be hard. Like, don't get me wrong. Like, I'm an emotional person. After, like, a few months or a few some, like, weeks, I'm able to, like, articulate correctly, like, how I'm feeling or what, like, what I want to, like, what I want to say or how to, like, popularly advocate for someone. I can say that a couple last semester, there was a

situation where a few people were who were not Black, were saying the N word. And, you know, like, I was not okay with that, like, "Hey, that's not your word. One". So, I reported it. And, you know, I'm just going to like, leave it at that. I don't need to go tell people, like, oh, I already did this, 'cause, you know, I'm an ally or whatever. But it- it got me worried or where I really had to, like, step up and tell the people that needed to know was because I thought they were in danger. A lot of the times these people would say that I'm going to go to this person's home and, you know, give them a piece of my mind. And, you know, they were a woman. So, and they were a Black woman. So, my fear was, like, okay, I had a similar situation where someone that I thought was my friend would not leave me alone and ended up going to my house multiple times. God forbid this person who is not from home, Chico is not their home, and their mom is, like, further away. I want to keep them safe because sure these people could be joking, but at the end of the day, I'd rather be safe than sorry. I'd rather make it a big deal than have someone that I'm becoming friends with end up hurt or worse. And I mean, luckily, like, everything's fine. Hopefully, those guys got educated. [Alma and Bella laugh] So there are points where I really, like, do, like, need to take a break and, like, go cry and then come back because you know, I know I'm an emotional person, and I know that alligator tears are not usually, like, the best to try to solve certain problems. So that is something that I'm, like, very grateful that there are staff members on Chico State who are there to support us and like, teach us how to, like, properly advocate. If it wasn't for them, I don't think I would have that courage to do so as often as I do and speak my mind as intensely as I do.

Bella: Mm hm. Awesome. I also wanted to ask you about... well, because El Centro is extremely new...

Alma: Yes.

Bella: We wanted to get your thoughts on kind of, like, an overall idea, but basically, what do you think about the changing demographics at Chico State and how specifically the Star Center was turned into El Centro to fit one of these many new demographics?

Alma: Yeah. At first, it was bitter. I was really sad. And I mean, the Star Center was my home. It was where I started to meet people. I started to feel more connected to Chico State. Through the Star Center I met amazing people that were, one, helped me get my job. I met Liz and I was able to meet Ernie, I was able to meet Angela, I was able to meet Jennifer, I met Tyreke through them, I met Darnel. I took a woman of color in leadership class, my freshman year with Briana, and she's no longer working at Chico State. I think she's working at a different CSU. So that place was a really a big hub and that one, everyone, every one of every color, of every ethnicity, of every background from different parts of California to out of state, were able to be there and actually make it a place to study. The CCLC [Cross Cultural Leadership Center] is a known space, like for more, like a hangout, like, more social. So, it's a lot more homey, the lighting is a lot warmer. While the Star Center was more like an ethnic academic space. A lot of people described it as coffee, you know, like you're at a coffee shop and you're able to talk and like, hang out and you're able to do homework. They offer, like, types of tutoring, they offer academic support by, like advising, they had drop in hours. They had connections through a lot of different centers to get help. Like if I needed help with a scholarship, they took me to a certain place or if I need help signing up for classes, they broke it down for me. So, when we found out last semester that the Star Center was closing, it was very bitter. It was very bitter

sweet because we felt like that was the only, one of the only places in Chico that we could actually, like, feel we could be ourselves without any judgment, where we could just study and not worry about who or what we looked like or what our background was. And then 'cause, like, literally, that was, it was a melting pot. So, when we found out that we were getting affinity centers, a lot of students, and I was included in that space where it was “Why are we having different centers? It feels like we're segregating ourselves. Why does the BRC [Black Resource Center] have to be by themselves? Why does the Latinx have to be by themselves? Why does APIDA [Asian Pacific Islander and Desi American] center have to be by themselves? And why are we so far away from each other?” And we learned that Chico State wanted to emulate San Jose where their affinity centers were. And now we've kind of you know, taken the Star center as our goal to eventually be for students, for all of our centers. I can't really speak much about how my co-workers at the BRC or APIDA feel, but at least what I've heard of my own co-workers at El Centro is, we still go and hang out with the BRC and the APIDA and like, it's still each center. We can see how lively each place is. I mean, we go down the BRC. It's packed in there. Like there's people like watching TV. They're studying and same thing with the center [El Centro]. Like, we have our music going. It's very colorful. We have our bean bags, and we're getting more students to come in and same with the APIDA center. Like it's always lively in there. So, at first, it was really hard to see the Star Center really go away. But we are trying to see what Jennifer and Tyreek did, because if it wasn't for Jennifer and Tyreek, the Star Center would have never been a part, because that was a very, like, new space. I think it was only alive for four years, four to three years before we got our centers because we [El Centro] just opened up this semester. And, we really wanted to, like, highlight everyone's diversity, but, like, give them, each community, like, a space to be themselves unapologetically while at the same time leaning on each other for support and community.

Bella: Awesome. You kind of mentioned this before, but I wanted to ask again, what are some of the organizations that you guys work with on Chico State, you mentioned CalFresh, there any others?

Alma: Yeah, so CalFresh, we work with AS [Associated Students]. We also work with Jesse [Ramirez]. He is a counselor here in Chico State. So, his home base is the CCLC, but he has dropping hours in MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement]. He has dropping hours in the BRC [Black Resource Center] and APIDA [Asian Pacific Islander and Desi American], which I just realized I'm not giving you guys a full name I'm just using the acronym. So, the BRC is a Black Resource Center, which highlights Black Excellence at Chico State. And APIDA is Asian Pacific Islander and Desi Community, who also highlight excellence where their community. We all have Jesse [Ramirez], we all have CalFresh, we have drop in studying. So, some resources that we have is that we have Spanish tutoring with Sam, with her from Mondays, no, not Mondays. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and I think Wednesdays from 12:00 P.M. to 1:00 P.M. We have drop in hours for the writing center. Hopefully, the more people come and more funding that we get, we're able to actually expand our tutoring with math and more STEM space classes and to give, like, our students more help. We also are partnering up with a resident professor. So right now, we have Dr. Lopez [Dr. Gloria Lopez]. She is a graduate from... oh, my gosh.

Bella: It was somewhere in like the Midwest.

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: I can't remember.

Alma: My co-worker was also in the same uh... It wasn't Iowa. It wasn't Nebraska. Definitely wasn't Nebraska. [Bella laughs] Carolina? North Carolina, South Carolina... something. Anyway, somewhere in the Midwest, I think. And so, we wanted to work with professors so that students had, like, felt safe enough to go and like, ask for help. Like, let's say I want to go apply to a grad school, Dr. Lopez is a great resource. She went through it twice, the application process, and she's also a history buff. So, I mean, if a student just wanted, like, quick help with, like, "Hey, I'm interested in this topic, but I don't really know how to get other resources" or "How can I go and talk to my professor?" or like, "How do I talk to my advisor?", usually our resident professor is there to help students. We also collaborate with the library. So, we have [librarian] Stefani [Baldivia] in our center, and so she's there to help students with research problems. So, let's say, like, Bella, if you need to, like, do an intense paper, but you don't know where to start. You can always drop into the star... star center [shakes head], to the El Centro. [Alma and Bella laugh] And ask Stephanie for help, and she will, like navigate the library database for you, and she'll direct you to certain places, like, the podcast room here at Chico State, like, I didn't know we had this. It's really cool. So, like, we also work with them, we also work with the GSEC [Gender and Sexuality Equity Coalition]. Whenever we can, we try to collaborate with them. We used to have in house academic... like mentors. So that's going to be one of our goals is to actually have mentors here in our centers where we can mentor incoming students who don't know how to navigate and need help with, like, college life and the college experience, and just how to navigate because it can get really hard. But we're trying to open our collaborations more. Like, I hopefully can get really close to MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement] and LTC [Latinos in Technical Careers] and NSBE [National Society of Black Engineers] so we can collaborate with them, and they are engineering-based STEM clubs and hubs. So, MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement] is a STEM hub here in Chico State, which is highlighting LatinX, Black, Asian, people of color, low-income, first-generation students and vets [veterans] here in Chico State who are pursuing their degree in science. So engineering, STEM, coding, civil, construction...

Elizabeth: [in background] Agriculture.

Alma: Agriculture. Thank you. Yeah, Ag. Ag and mathematics. So, they have, like, a nice hub in, like, O'Connell [O'Connell Technology Center], and bless your all hearts that you guys have to go there, 'cause ugh. Y'all noses must be, must be happy.

Elizabeth: There's one in Plumas [Plumas Hall].

Alma: Oh, yeah, girl. Plumas, ugh, Plumas mnm-mm-m [shakes head].

Elizabeth: Plumas is better.

Alma: It is better. [Bella laughs] It's so much better than O'Connell, 'cause you guys get, like, air to go through.

Bella: Oh, yeah.

Alma: Well, O'Connell's like, it's stuck, and there's no ventilation.

Elizabeth: I've been in there once and it's terrifying.

Alma: Oh, it's terrifying. Oh, yeah.

Elizabeth: I've only been in there once...

Alma: Yeah. The third and fourth...

Elizabeth: And I'm like, what are these people talking about?

Alma: Good, girl. The third and second floor, horrendous. It just gets stuck there. The fourth floor is just weird. [Bella laughs] It's like a different, it does not follow the layout of the fourth, I mean, the third and the first floor. It's just, it's like amaze. There's no windows up there. And there's like one class up there, which is so weird, but, like, the smell gets stuck. So, MESA's down there, as well as LTC and NSBE, and LTC is Latinos in Technical Career, which is to highlight Latinx engineering students, ag students, and coding students. It is focused more on like tech career-based majors. So we highlight, we, they highlight conferences, so like they prepare you for your resume, how to talk to employers, like, right now, they're off in Anaheim for the National SHPE [Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers] Convention, which is a really big convention, where we can talk to really big companies to hopefully get an internship or get a job. And NSBE is Society of Black Engineers for Chico State. And that one, you don't have to be Black or Hispanic to be in any of those two clubs, but they are more focused on certain communities. And it's the same thing, a little bit different, but it does have the same things of, like, LTC, where they help you with your resume. They do workshops. And you go to the National NSBE Convention. So that one this year is going to be in Chicago. So, you get to meet with like, big companies as well. Last year, they were in Atlanta. A few of my, now friends went, and, like Nintendo was there. Google was there. Windows was there. So, I know one of my friends stayed in line for 2 hours just to talk to Nintendo. Yeah. And it gets packed, but it's like you get certain opportunities to actually get scholarships through them. And like they help you with preparing for internships, like, how to dress, like, how to make your resume stand out, and they prepare you for, you know, the real world. So that's like our goal for our centers to be able to collaborate with them and give that opportunity for students who don't know about these because those are not as often, they weren't highlighted. I had to learn about these people through, like, my therapist here in Chico State because I didn't know, which now we're doing a better job of, like, advertising and on their social media posts, like, "Hey, this is who we are". I know, now, because LTC has grown so much. You had to write an essay to go to the SHPE convention. So [Alma and Bella laugh] that, is getting, like, whoop, intense, but it's good 'cause that means that we're now helping more students who are coming into Chico State, who didn't have this access before.

Bella: Awesome. I, gosh, I love all the different organizations that you're involved in, and it's awesome that there's a lot of intersection between all the different ones.

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: Wanted to ask, kind of wrapping up as we have about 10 minutes left. But are there, is there anything that you would like anyone listening to this later on, cause it is an oral history.

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: So, people will be listening to it later. Whether it be students, community members, who else is going through the archive.

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: To know about El Centro and how Chico State is changing, and what you think is maybe ahead, for the future?

Alma: I don't know what's ahead. We can be wishful that these centers are going to be here permanently, but we really don't know if there's going to be any funding. For those who you know, the future listeners, give yourself grace. If you're a new student here in Chico State, especially if you're of color, if you're a woman, or if you're nonbinary, trans, or just someone who did not think you could make it into any university. You did it. You work through it. It's hard. Give yourself grace. Like, I'm a STEM major. I'm also a humanities major. Like, I go through it. I cry all the time. You are in a space that is historically not made for you. And the fact that you are here and that you are learning and that you are forcing a spot at the table is amazing. And that you deserve it. If you are a woman, same thing goes for you. You are historically not supposed to be in this space. I mean, fuck, we didn't get our right to vote until early 20s [1920s]. Even then, it was white women's vote. But you guys are still supposed to be here. This is where you are going to be able to learn, hopefully. For the centers, I hope that in the future, that those become a home away from home, that you are able to create friendships, and that our jobs and our legacy is to really highlight our voices, to make a community stronger, to connect to different community members, to learn, to embrace ourselves, and just to help you get through this point in your life. For community members of Chico going through the archives, whatever you're going through, or whatever you're trying to learn, or you're trying to find, I hope that this small piece of information really helps you with your journey, whatever you take away. Be that to be unapologetically yourself. If you need to cry, go fucking cry. If you need to go speak about something that you know is wrong, speak about it, it is hard but trust me, fighting for it is worth it. Yeah, that's just that, one, like, everyone in this room is a woman, is an AFAB [Assigned Female at Birth]. We are in a space that was historically not made for us. So, let's just give ourselves some props. We have a history major, assuming agriculture because of your hoodie.

Elizabeth: Pre-vet.

Alma: Pre-vet, period, woman in STEM. Women in STEM! [everyone laughs] So, yeah, like, we're here and, like, make noise, break that barrier. If the space is good, like, I really hope that you guys are able to learn and just take a time to, like, give yourself a moment of "Shit, I made it. I'm where I'm supposed to be, even if it's hard", because God, we know that life is really hard, whatever is going on. We're going to get through it, and hopefully these centers are a stepping stone to improve Chico State, to highlight every single voice.

Bella: Awesome. Thank you so much, Alma. This was awesome. You had a lot to say.

Alma: Oh, yeah.

Bella: There's some things about El Centro that I had, I didn't know about.

Alma: Yeah.

Bella: I think they're just awesome. So yeah, thank you. Elizabeth, if you want to say thank you. [in the background] Just for the recording. [passes microphone to Elizabeth]

Elizabeth: Yes. Thank you so much. It was so much fun just hearing you talk and, like, hearing the similarities, 'cause I'm in CSC² for the College of Agriculture. And like, we have mentees, but we just started doing that.

Alma: Yeah.

Elizabeth: It's cool to, like, hear that perspective from other programs.

Alma: Oh, yeah. Like, if I have my friends who are also like, being mentees, I'm like, damn, you guys like. It's that weird feeling of imposter syndrome like, "Shit, should I actually be doing this?", but, like...

Elizabeth: I know!

Alma: Y'all do it. Like you guys are doing the work. Like, even Jose, the guy in the front desk, is like, "Oh, I was gonna ask you" like "Girl boss sign me up. I need that money". But, no, like your background, the things that you've gone through are gonna help someone, and that's like, that's awesome. And, like, honestly, even though, we all go through impostor syndrome, it's the fact that like fuck yeah, you're right. I am in this space that's, like, not for me. Like "Screw it. I'm gonna be a fuckin' vet. And I'm gonna help someone".

Elizabeth: Oh, yeah.

Alma: You know? Like, I'm gonna help teach people something that I didn't know about. Like, who knows? Maybe your mentee needs CalFresh, and like, CalFresh has drop-in hours in El Centro so, like, you can like direct them there, too, or, like, you need drop-in hours for therapy, fuckin' Jessie, too. [Bella and Elizabeth laugh] Like he has drop-in hours. So like, that's awesome.

Elizabeth: Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

Alma: Yeah, thank you. It's like the first time I'd done something like this and not cried.