

Oral History Transcription

OH # UA-016-02

Narrator: Jamile Balli

Interviewers: Braden Horner and Bethany McCarroll

Date: October 29th, 2024

Location: Chico, California

BETHANY MCCARROL: Hello. My name is Bethany McCarroll, and today is Tuesday, October 29th, 2024. It is currently 9:30 in the morning. My partner, Braden Horner and I are conducting this interview in the Meriam Library Podcast Studio in Chico, California. We are here with El Centro program coordinator, Jamille Balli. This interview is a part of the oral history project, Preserving Chico State Voices for Change, which aims to achieve and narrate the history of community activism at Chico State.

BETHANY: Okay. Hello. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this oral history project. I want to remind you that this may be published as part of the Oral History Archives project for Dr. Gloria Lopez and our Ethnic Studies Methodologies course at California State University Chico. And we need your permission to publish this transcript in part or in its entirety. Do we have permission to record this interview?

JAMILE BALLI: Yes.

BETHANY: All right. So, to get started, we're just going to ask you some basic information. So, can you please tell us your full name and your occupation here at California State, Chico?

JAMILE: Yes. It's Jamile Balli. I'm the Program Coordinator of El Centro Resource Center.

BETHANY: Okay. Thank you. Would you tell us a little bit about why you came to Chico State?

JAMILE: Sure. I grew up in Merced, California, just 3.5 hours south of Chico, and I spent my whole life there from kindergarten through community college. And I also worked for the University of California at Merced [UC Merced] when it was established there in Chico, I mean in Merced. And so, I pretty much felt like I've done a lot of Merced, so I wanted something new. I applied to a lot of different positions, and Chico's the one where I got hired. I'm like, okay, great, let's go. Chico. It is.

BETHANY: Okay, so more of a convenience, as well as something new.

JAMILE: Yeah, a new opportunity. Yeah, a new place to be. Yeah.

BETHANY: And then when you were going to college, what was your major? Like, were you always interested in this?

JAMILE: No. I was, I went to California State University, Stanislaus [Stanislaus State], which was my local CSU [California State University] in Turlock, and I was an English major. And so, I really loved literature, and I loved British literature, you know, specifically, but I thought I was going to be like a scholar. It was very glamorous thing to me. But, like, the reality of scholarship and being a scholar is a lot different from the things that I imagined. And so, I just pivoted. So, I went actually right after undergrad, I went in and I got a master's degree in English as well because I thought I was going to teach at the university level. Then I started teaching, and I didn't really enjoy it. And so, I had to pivot from that. And once I graduated, I started working with migrant education, which was helping high school students who come from rural farming backgrounds who do a lot of working because their parents work with the fields and like, harvesting different crops across the US or in California. And so, they lose a lot of time because they follow their families, and they don't stay in one community for the whole school year. And so that makes it very challenging to graduate. So, working with those students and then working for UC Merced in the Educational Opportunity Program as an outreach counselor to help students make college accessible, really kind of gave me a sense of mission. I went to a conference called the Equity Gap Summit, and that really helped me clarify, like, that students of color in particular accessing higher education can be a crisis point because sometimes even their teachers don't believe they can be successful, and that to me was sort of a heartbreaking thing because it seemed like a betrayal, because for me, education in school had always been a place of success and a place where I felt comfortable and at home, and the idea that others would not necessarily feel comfortable or at home in those areas and not feel supported and not feel welcome was really hard for me, and I wanted to make a difference there and be a voice for some students that maybe didn't get encouraged to pursue higher education and didn't get told that they were capable of doing it and didn't have the means and didn't have the support in order to make that happen. And so that really clarified my desire to work with students in higher education to help the process be a lot easier to help make it possible.

BETHANY: That's very nice. So you're saying that, like, your desire for helping these students, were there any other influential, like, mentors you had in your life that really made this an impact for you?

JAMILE: Well, I think Doctor Harriet Blodgett, RIP, Dr. Blodgett. She was really instrumental. She was actually one of my professors at Stanislaus State, and she, I mean, she wasn't

necessarily, like, everybody's favorite professor, but maybe I just have a penchant for tough love, but she didn't, you know, she was a straight shooter. But she was tough, but I think she was one of the few people who told me you're very smart and you can do this. But you have to work on this stuff, you know? And sometimes you need to hear things like that. And Dr. Blodgett once told me I was her graduate student assistant for one of her classes, and I went in to her, and she told me one day, "I was afraid you were going to come in here and tell me you're gonna drop out of your master's degree", and I'm like, "Well, I guess I'm not going to tell you that, then." I'm like, I'm so I didn't. And so, I was really having a hard time, a huge imposter syndrome in that program, I think, my first year, and she really helped me turn it around and talk to professors for me and really helped me get through the process. And I don't think if it wasn't for Dr. Blodgett, that I would be here today because she was really instrumental on that journey for me.

BETHANY: Wow, that's really great. We really do appreciate those teachers that give us some tough love because it's usually them that are really helping us.

JAMILE: Right.

BETHANY: Show that we can do something different.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: I love that.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: So, moving on. How did you become involved with your higher education, like, leading into admission specifically, which led you into the CCLC [Cross-Cultural Leadership Center] and El Centro?

JAMILE: Yeah, well, I think with outreach, working with high schoolers, I think specifically, and the admission process when I worked at UC Merced, we focused not on just UC admission, although it was kind of a central kind of focus, but not entirely. So we learned about all the four, we had to teach students and parents as well about all the four systems of higher education in California and how you can access those, and all the aspects about accessing higher education in California, whether you're going to community college, a private school, UC or CSU in California. How can I make that happen? And how can your parents make that happen and help you make that happen? So, it was a very broad kind of background in college admission. So that led directly into an admissions position because I was knowledgeable about how to navigate the higher education system in California. When I worked in admissions, it was eight years, you know, I had learned you know, Chico state, I felt like, pretty well, at that point, at least how to

access admissions to the university. Things changed very quickly and have changed even in the last couple of years since the pandemic, but and so I don't know that I could go right back into it, but that really gave me that foundation. But so, I wanted to try something different. I went into the CCLC because it was a challenge. It wasn't necessarily um, something that I had a grounding in, but it was definitely a learning experience, and just another function of like that my initial concern about equity and access to higher education. And it's one thing to bring students to the university, but it's another thing to provide the resources and the spaces that students need to be successful. I mean, you know, I could just know, some people can't just thug it out. You know, they just can't white knuckle it and not ask for any help and not crash and burn, you know, you shouldn't have to do that.

BETHANY: Totally agree

JAMILE: You shouldn't have to suffer through higher education to make it. You know, you can find spaces where you're welcome and celebrated.

BETHANY: Mhm

JAMILE: And that's really what the CCLC was, a space that's a part of the college process in terms of retention and student success, which is the other partner of admissions, right? Once you're in, great, but what happens to you after you get that letter? What is your journey going to be like? So that kind of, it was for me, it made a logical jumping point. Okay, you did that. We got you in. What are we going to do now?

BETHANY: Yeah. Exactly. That's kind of how it is a lot more for, like, First Gen or just first not exactly First Gen, but I mean, it's a first time experience for yourself.

JAMILE: Well, you know, even when I worked in admissions, even middle class parents were like, I haven't gone to college in 30 years. Like, I don't know what my kid needs, you know.

BETHANY: Yeah

JAMILE: And so, if that's you, if that's a middle class parent, imagine a parent who hasn't had any education or didn't go beyond high school or elementary school. How much more of a mystery is that for them? You know,

BETHANY: Yeah, which is different for a lot of reasons, too.

JAMILE: Mhm

BETHANY: But, yeah. So, with your work here, how long in total, have you been here at Chico State or in your work, I guess?

JAMILE: Yeah. So, it's been 15 years, which is bananas. Like, wow. Time goes by really quick. Yeah. I started here in 2010, so now it's 2024. So, is it 15? Yeah. I don't know about it. Almost 15.

BETHANY: Yeah, almost 15, we're almost to 2025, almost there.

JAMILE: Couple of months away. Yeah.

BETHANY: And then your career like throughout Chico State, was it just straight admission and then straight over to the CCLC?

JAMILE: Yeah yeah, it was straight. Yeah. It was eight years admission, four year CCLC, and now El Centro. So, I wasn't doing a lot of jumping around. Yeah.

BETHANY: Okay. Okay. And then was there, like a big, like, I guess, like, gap between like your expertise from admissions to your CCLC?

JAMILE: I think so. I think the equity and diversity work is very specific. And it also changes very quickly, as well. And the world, I think it's kind of a reflection of what happens in the world too, equity and diversity work of what things society's grappling with. You know, when the pandemic happened and we had the Eric Gardner case, like, those things really came up and came into the consciousness of American society, the Black Lives Matter movement, when we had, you know, instances of Asian hate. All these things, right kind of bubble up. They're always existent. But at some point, in time, they kind of boil over. And when those things boil over, equity and diversity work, which you know, maybe we should all do, but has to kind of navigate those waters.

BETHANY: Okay. And then I would say, was your takeaway from, like, both of these positions, like, how did they impact you for you to move forward with El Centro? Cause it's so new

JAMILE: Gosh. Yeah. That's a really good question. I don't know that I've reflected on that. I guess I mean, in many way I'm a reflective person, but in many ways, I'm still just thuggin' it out. like I don't know like.

BETHANY: Yeah. It's okay, it's okay

JAMILE: That's a great question. But I don't think I've thought about it because the work is like the work is immediate. And when the work is immediate, especially when you're tasked with starting a new space on campus. Like, we've never had one before. How does this work? You know? And so, you just have to. I guess my philosophy in my career life now is like, you know, just try things, throw things at the wall, see what sticks. And if it works great, if it doesn't keep it- pushing, keep going. And we'll see, I think at the end of this first year, and I can already see things that, you know, we need to change or do differently. But I think at the end of this first year, maybe I'll be able to reflect a bit more about that. That's a great question.

BETHANY: Okay. Now, I'm going to lead over to, was there, like, a big switching point that really want you to switch over to the CCLC, or is it just, like.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: That's just kind of what led to it.

JAMILE: Well, it was part of it. There were a lot of things happening. There were a lot of changes in staffing, and there were changes in, like, our directors, and just a lot of things were happening. And it was, it felt a little bit unstable. And so, which was in hindsight, was really good. You know, I'm glad because I'm glad where this part of my journey has taken me. But yeah, I think it was a lot of things. It was just understanding that, look, you've done this for a long time, and it's not really super challenging anymore. And then all these things are changing, and I don't know how I feel about that. And look, there's this opportunity. Like, why not? Let's try. And so that's kind of what led to the change.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Okay. So, like, I'd say that the CCLC for you was probably, like, the biggest thing that could have happened, and, like, just was a really good thing.

JAMILE: Yeah, for sure.

BETHANY: And so, I kind of want to ask this question for that.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Would you change having to leave admissions, or, like, now, would you rather be in admissions still?

JAMILE: Oh, definitely not. No. No.

BETHANY: Okay.

JAMILE: I mean, admissions is great, but you don't. Well, it depends. Like you're constantly on the move. There's always a new cycle. There's always people to see and talk to, and that's great. And again, the message is important. You can come to college, here's how you can make it happen because that's a big message, and not everybody gets that message. And certain people, our society automatically deems not worthy of getting that message, you know, in some ways, which is unfortunate. So, there's importance there, I think, and I'm grateful for that start. But I think having this ability to celebrate culture and identity and help students because everybody if you're a person of color, everybody has their own journey with their own identity and what it means to be a specific your ethnicity in the United States. That's all informed by your family and your experiences and your community and society at large. And a lot of times for a lot of students college is when that happens. When you start thinking about what it means to be a person of color in my family, in my community, in the United States, in my world, you know, and that is, like, such an amazing conversation because it's transformative. Not many of us have to grapple with our identity, right? Some of us can just go through the world as we are, and nobody questions that. But if you're not like that, then the world is going to, like, ask you questions or going to make you define yourself in certain ways. And so, it's such an important thing, and even full on adults haven't had that conversation. But in the CCLC, we're kind of having that conversation. And it's really important, right, because it attaches to your sense of self, your sense of self-esteem, to what you think you're capable of in the world or even here in the university. You know? Gosh, that's a huge tangent. Sorry.

BETHANY: No, you're okay.

JAMILE: I don't even remember the original question anymore.

BETHANY: You're totally fine. I think I think you answered it along the way.

JAMILE: Okay okay.

BETHANY: I think you're okay. So, when you first switched to the Cross Cultural Leadership Center

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Which is the CCLC, what position did you, like initially hold?

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: What was the work looking like?

JAMILE: Yeah. It's the same thing. So, it was the same position as a program coordinator. And so, it was the same thing as creating programs for the campus community. But we focused primarily on social cultural events, right?

BETHANY: Okay.

JAMILE: And so, In El Centro, we are supposed to be more of an academic retention and study space. And so that is the primary difference. But because we're so new, we are pulling, we're pushing out a lot of cultural programs, so we have an identity and footprint on the campus right now. We're literally nine weeks old, right?

BETHANY: So really new.

JAMILE: Yeah, we're fairly new. And so, we're trying to so that people know us, right? They think of us. Oh, yeah. El Centro.

BETHANY: Get in contact?

JAMILE: Yeah. Like, oh El Centro is there. They're a Latinx access space, but everybody's welcome. And we're this place where people who want to learn about Latine, Latinx culture can come and participate and live, you know, do life with other people. And then I mean, we're starting. We're starting to bring in more academic work in there. We offer tutoring but love to see that expanded. And then we also have limitations of budget too you know. Gosh. And yeah, so there's a lot to do, right? So, but I think in the CCLC, really doing that cultural programming is nothing.

BETHANY: Okay.

JAMILE: Like, now I'm used to it. And if you look at El Centro right now and the programming that we're doing, we had, like, in the first couple of weeks, we've had 400 students come through.

BETHANY: Wow

JAMILE: And we have, yeah, 36 programs already under our belt and more and counting, right?

BETHANY: Ah that's so great.

JAMILE: Yeah, so, you know, and I have to give credit to my student staff, right, because I can't do all that myself.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: So, the student programmers are really kind of leading the charge and doing the work and making the space what it is. It really is, I mean, and that's one of the things too about this work is that you're developing student leaders, right? And students who want to make an impact on their community and make an impact on the campus and create welcoming spaces. And so, working along students along like that is a privilege as well, you know. And so yeah.

BETHANY: That's awesome. So happy for you guys to already have so much under your belt. Just starting out.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: So going back to- you were saying that you were also working during the pandemic.

JAMILE: Mhm.

BETHANY: So, did any, like, the purpose or the mission change at all during the pandemic, like, what were some, like, changes you had to do or like?

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Well, improvise.

JAMILE: It was really challenging because everybody- we had to move all our programming to virtual programming. And that's really hard like to have cultural programming online. We did our best, you know.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: But when you're fatigued about going to school all day, do you want to stay on the computer for another hour or two to do something else online?

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: Even if it's fun. So, I mean, it was even hard for a student staff to keep being engaged. So, it was just like it was like you're on a little raft, and you're just trying to keep everybody on the raft, so nobody falls off.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: You know, that's kind of what it felt like. It was very challenging. Work wise.

BETHANY: Work wise. Yeah.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Yeah, as a student, I could say that it probably wouldn't have had as much of an impact if it was still in person.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: As well as it being virtual, was this something that made you almost want to quit doing it because it was online or?

JAMILE: No, strangely enough. No, not really. I had worked for the CCLC for six months, and then we went into the pandemic. And so, it was just, like, take it as you go because you don't know what's happening.

BETHANY: What's happening?

JAMILE: Yeah. Like, I mean, you don't know what you don't know, right? Like, so it didn't make me want to quit. I actually was getting a second master's degree during that time.

BETHANY: Oh wow, okay.

JAMILE: Yeah. Which, honestly, it was great, because it was sort of a captive audience.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: You know, there was no conflicts. And I've always wanted- I had wanted to get a second master's in higher education while I was in admissions. But being a recruiter and traveling made it really difficult. I don't think I could have done it during that time because you didn't have, you know, set times where you could go to class and then do homework. And so

almost, like, the pandemic, in some ways was a gift because I was able to get that second master's degree in higher education. And in some ways, it was rejuvenating because I wasn't as stressed out.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: Because I had more time to, like, do creative things, and, So it was a couple of hours where you know, we had to, like, struggle to, you know, keep everybody engaged. And then after that, my time was mine, you know, and going to school at that time was actually great because I got to think. There was things to think about and things to discuss with people. And I wasn't bored, you know, and so it was for me, like, a really it was a challenging time work wise, but personally, it was a really dynamic and creative time for me. I must miss it honestly.

BETHANY: Yeah. I will say, I don't miss it as much.

JAMILE: Yeah

BETHANY: Just because for me, online learning wasn't my favorite.

JAMILE: Yeah. No. No.

BETHANY: But I do miss being to be like, Oh, I can just turn over. I'm in my room. I'm already home.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Like, I don't have to make the extra travel time to.

JAMILE: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think it's Yeah, definitely different. Like, if I were a student, just a student, I don't know.

BETHANY: *laughs*

JAMILE: Like, Oh, no. And I mean, my heart goes out to students who, like, this was their senior year

BETHANY: Oh yeah.

JAMILE: Or they missed out on some pivotal things because that's just so challenging. Yeah.

BETHANY: Okay, now we're going to do a little bit of a turn. So, from our previous conversations, we know that our campus was in a bit of a state of turmoil during the 2020 election with the rampant hate speech.

JAMILE: Mhm

BETHANY: Would you be able to provide us with something like your experience with the CCLC?

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: During that time?

JAMILE: Yeah. So again, I think in a lot of ways the CCLC was called to formulate some kind of response, right or to hold space for students. And that time was so kind of, what's the word? Not dynamic, but more I need a stronger word, like, contentious. It was a contentious time. And I don't think there was a lot of patience on either side, or, like, I mean, it was just so much vitriol going on at that time. And it was, like, nobody had any sense of shame about it. You know, it was bananas. Like, oof, it was wild. And so, you know, when we had that speaker who came to campus, that was controversial, we were actually called upon to act as, like, like, a bodyguard almost, right?

BETHANY: Wow, okay.

JAMILE: To be at that speech and to watch the crowd and to, like, keep things from getting out of hand, you know? And I will say our director at the time, Crystal Tonga, she's now at, I believe it's CSU East Bay was, like, an expert at that, so I was able to learn a lot from her by watching what she did.

BETHANY: Mhm.

JAMILE: Could I do what she did, like, no, I think you have to have, like a specific skill set to be able to handle those kinds of disagreements in that way. But just this idea that we had in the CCLC is always, do you want to be right, or do you want to be effective?

BETHANY: Mhm.

JAMILE: Do you want to really have dialogue, or you know, are we just interested in creating conflict? You know? And so, I mean, many ways, sometimes the people who I mean, it's kind of unfortunate. I don't know. Like, it feels like to me that a lot of times the people are often the people who have things targeted towards them are burdened also with being understanding.

BETHANY: Mhm.

JAMILE: And so, But, you know, on the other side of that, how you can't have conflict? You can't have things devolved into chaos. We saw what that was like on January the sixth, right?

BETHANY: Yeah, it was like.

JAMILE: We can't have that. And because you can't have a civil and working functioning society when things like that happen. And so, and it's really challenging, right? Because people get heated, right? People got heated during that time. And so, you had to kind of try to bring people to the middle. Like, can you, understand, you know, or can we not like, protect yourself and protect yourself from hearing things that are going to be personally or culturally destructive, that aren't necessary. So, you had to give people or can you respond, but respond in constructive ways that don't create chaos?

BETHANY: Yeah. I be like that devil's advocate.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Forever?

JAMILE: Yeah. Yeah. Can you like, not let it get to you, because a lot of that did get to people, right? And it was harmful. And so, we had to try to mitigate that harm, which is a crazy like a bananas task, right?

BETHANY: Yeah. And then you were saying that, like, there was a speaker that came, they kind of had to body guard you. Do you remember who that speaker was?

JAMILE: I would have to go back and look.

BETHANY: Okay.

JAMILE: Yeah. I mean, it was somebody notorious in the political world at that time,

BETHANY: Okay.

JAMILE: But I don't remember. I would have to go back and look a couple of years back.

BETHANY: And, like, what was like their message? Like, do you remember what they actually came to speak about?

JAMILE: It was like it was I think it was one of the conservative clubs on campus that brought the speaker here. And so, it was just really, like, rhetoric that incited people, you know, that played to their worst prejudices about others, you know, and society, but caging it in a in political speak, right? That made it more palatable, right? And I think that's kind of, like, what was going on at that time, right? We had, like, really kind of terrible rhetoric that nobody really questioned at the time.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: And so, yeah, it was that, but I would have to look and see.

BETHANY: Okay.

JAMILE: I don't remember. He hasn't really been in the public eye this election anymore. He kind of fell off the radar.

BETHANY: Okay. Yeah. We'll probably be able to find it.

JAMILE: Yeah. I can look for it and send that over to you both tomorrow.

BETHANY: Thank you.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: As well as, like, so during that time, like, did you see a lot of, like, heated discussion or anything like in the CLC, like center at all, like, or, like, just kind of near you that you're like, Hey, we need to chill out like a safe space?

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: Like did any of that?

JAMILE: Yeah. Not in the center, but, like, outside the center. When you had, like, people tabling. One, there was one instance where you know, I think it was one of the conservative clubs on campus and other students were responding to that. I think they were campaigning on campus or something. And there was an incident. I think we can go back and look at records that I think one a student of color slapped, like a paper out of someone's hands, and that was like this

huge deal on campus. And, you know, I think conservative news outlets like, reported on it, even, like.

BETHANY: Oh wow.

JAMILE: It was just bananas

BETHANY: Yeah, like blowing it out of proportion at that time.

JAMILE: Yeah. Like, literally, it was a lot. It was a lot. And it was And I would have to go and look at the records and what happened because I don't remember, but I do remember being out there, you know, and the tension and, like, what's going to happen and people just standing around watching and, like, waiting for something to pop off.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: You know, because some people want it. You know.

BETHANY: The drama.

JAMILE: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So yeah, I was kind of looking back on it, reflecting on it. It was kind of, like, it was wild. It was wild.

BETHANY: Yeah. As well as that, do you feel like maybe during that time, there could have been more that the CCLC, or anything else on campus could have to, like, calm everyone down?

JAMILE: I don't know. Like is a university a reflection of its society? You know.

BETHANY: I feel like, yes, in a way, but also it shouldn't be because it's only a small portion of

JAMILE: Yeah. I mean,

BETHANY: Society? at point?

JAMILE: Yeah. I mean, and you have to look, I think, where we are, you know, and kind of like the political climate of our geographical area as well. And I don't know. I think universities are not necessarily places where gosh. I don't know. Like, it's a good question, you know? It's a really good question. I mean, I think what the university did was say, we stand in favor of free speech, right? And we're going to have, even though it's a very volatile time in society, we're still going to have this speaker here. And we're going to do everything that we can to protect that,

right? And so, I think that they did something. And then for us, as a space was for the CCLC to say, okay, how do you explain this to your students? How do you help them think about the university doing this when that seems to be tacit approval for that world view. And can two things be true at once, that the CCLC exists to protect and value students like you. And that speaker can come to campus and say these things because it values free speech and other alternative views as well? Can the university hold those two things at once? And maybe at that time, it did.

BETHANY: Okay. Thank you. So, we'll be moving on.

BETHANY: Okay. So, what are ways that young people and students can take effective action for change in the community through the CCLC or El Centro?

JAMILE: Yeah, that's a great question. I think cultivating their own roles as leaders. I think a lot of times students don't look at themselves as leaders necessarily in their communities, and they definitely are. Umm. I mean, it's challenging, I think as a college student you have so many different kinds of responsibilities, and umm, tensions, right?

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: You have your academic life, you have your personal life on campus. And then given given, you know, your circumstance or whoever the student is, like, there may be a dynamic at home that requires your responsibility and your care as well. Umm. And so, which is often the case for students of color. It's not. I they're here, but it's not just them who is here. They're carrying so many things with them on their journey to the campus. And so, they may have those responsibilities, either for family or younger siblings or just, whatever, you know, at home. And so, you have that as well. And maybe you have to work on top of that, you know? And so, you have a lot of things. So, asking someone to be a leader on campus is, like, a very privileged thing. In some ways, it's like for some of us, we wouldn't, you know, think twice about asking students to take on these roles or umm, these responsibilities. But I think if you come from a background when you have an understanding of, like, a student is more than one thing, right? It can be challenging. But for some students that can, right, who have that capacity, and for some students, it's like a mission, too. Like, they already inherently have that desire to be a leader to cultivate that, to put themselves in spaces, wear voices. And again, that is also labor. And it can also be a burden, and it also is difficult. But put yourself in spaces where people like you aren't represented and where your voice matters. And really, I just saw one of the students, I know, through the NASPA [National Association for Student Personnel Administrators] undergraduate Fellows program, just started a group in the Ag department called Pride and Ag, right? And here but that is a risk, too, for that student, in some ways, because this is a, you know, a relatively, you know. new place for a person to be out in their identity. And that representation is so

important, but at the same time, that represents a risk. But if that person didn't do it, maybe nobody ever would. So, you know, I think for me, it's a challenging thing because you're asking students a lot, but if they don't, who will, you know.

BETHANY: For sure, yeah.

JAMILE: If not you who? Umm. So I think you know, being in spaces where you're not represented, creating opportunity and a chance for people to speak and to give your perspective is super important getting involved in the campus, structures that already exist, but maybe don't have someone who has a perspective and voice like yours is really important. I know, in the CCLC, when I was there when our last and again, these spaces change depending on who the leaders were and are. And so when I was at the CCLC, and we had, you know, our the founder and the director I was under, like, was very they had, like, active leadership programs to cultivate students as leaders. And again, it transitions. So right now, it's really a cultural social space. And El Centro really is supposed to be kind of an academic retention and students success space. So, it's almost like your leaders are the people who, the students who work there, right? By necessity, because I know I can speak to El Centro. Like our students are the ones who are learning how to facilitate conversations and organize events and talk to campus partners and work on collaborations. So really, I mean, I think that the ideal role is to have a paying role on campus because it. It umm kind of meets two needs, right? The economic need, but also by virtue of the position you get paid to develop these leadership skills. And they're going to serve you, I think once you're in the professional realm as well. Those are soft skills that maybe you don't learn in academic spaces sometimes. That was a very rambling answer, but

BETHANY: No. I like it. You gave a lot of background for it. I like your inference of basically umm, having, like, everyone look past just the title of student and realize that they're not just a student. They're a brother, they're a sister. Like, there's so much that is underlying in their title of students.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: And that's just that's really great, as well as, you know, you saying that, like, this is what your centers for, but there's more to it and that everyone needs someone to look up to, basically. So that's going to lead me to, like, I know you kind of said there was like a retention center and stuff like that. So, like, were there more services that umm, you had in El Centro, or was there not enough services that the CCLC provided that basically is now in El Centro? And Well, that's how it got started?

JAMILE: Yeah, well, no, again, El Centro is, like I said, I think, on our very first interview, it is an academic retention and students success space, and most CSUs have them. Uh like, it's not

anything new. The fact that we only had the CCLC since 2007 is really just like we were very behind the ball, in some ways in the CSU, I think I heard someone told me that there were only six CSUs that didn't have cultural spaces. So, and again, we were 137, 38-years-old in the CSU system, CSU Chico is the second oldest CSU in the system. So, the fact that we didn't have them, you know, what were we doing for 136 years.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: But so, because of the different mandate, I guess, you could say of the CCLC. It's really a cultural social space, who are also developing leaders, student leaders, maybe not through, like a like umm a established leadership program. But by virtue, again, like the El Centro is that your student staff become the de-facto leaders, right? They run the space on a daily basis, and they organize and facilitate and market your programming. And then it's the same principle for El Centro. We're unique in that we've been only open for, what? ten weeks. And so, we're really working on establishing our footprint on campus so that people know we're here. So that they know, oh, look, there's the space here that's new. We just opened. And so, I think that has been kind of our mission. Like, let people know we're here. Like, Hi. Welcome. Come in. And so, as I think we're doing a pretty good job. I think we're... I mean, I'm really proud of our students are pumping out programs a lot. You know, we've done 44 up to this point since the beginning of the school year in August. So not bad. You know, usually, there's something going on every single week at El Centro. But we really I'm really looking to start really developing more of the academic and student success portion of our programming. I was looking- doing research at other UCs and CSUs, and what are they doing? You know, what is standard? And I think a little bit of it, we're constrained by budget because we can't afford to pay, like all the tutors. Like, if you look at UC Davis El Centro, they have several math tutors, and they have several Bio and Chem tutors and not just regular Chem, but organic Chem, you know,

BETHANY: Oh.

JAMILE: Or Bio-Chem, you know? And so, they offer, like, like, a really robust range of tutoring services, and they have, like, a student success specialist embedded in their center as well. So, they have a lot. So, I'm. I have to try to find ways of bringing that to the center without having the money. So, like, I reached out to Mini Core. The professor there. She has tutors, Mini core tutors who need volunteer hours. So, I'm like, let me see what she has, and if she can send me some math tutors or some science tutors, and I just spoke with her yesterday and she may have, like a former Alum who's willing to volunteer. You know? And so, you have to, like, work around the limitations that you have. And kind of that's what we're in the process of doing. What can we do? Who can we partner with to bring students these resources? And, and we want to start a mentorship program, and we're kind of behind the ball on that as well, because we really should have started over the summer during orientation to get those folks because I think people

are thinking, Oh, I want to be a mentor, I want to be a mentee. And so, I think I'm learning a lot as we go, you know, and establishing the space. So, it's a unique experience, I think for me and for our student leaders.

BETHANY: That's very nice. And I hope it does reach that point.

JAMILE: I hope so too.

BETHANY: Sounds so great.

JAMILE: Me too, yeah.

BETHANY: And then, as well with those services, are you feeling that El Centro's doing a good job at that, as well as, like, what other programs have you seen that your students have responded best to so far?

JAMILE: Umm, I think just, like, uh for example, last Friday, we had a Nichos making workshop. With Chicano Latino Council on campus, which is our faculty and staff Association for the Latinx population. So, they came out to make Day of the Dead shadow boxes.

BETHANY: That's Awesome.

JAMILE: Yeah. And we had 36 people on a Friday, which is bananas to me because nobody wants to be on campus on a Friday. And so, the fact that we had that many folks. I don't know. We had tamales, so maybe that was part of it. Yeah. But to me, that's like a little win. And then, we had good response to making right now, we're kind of heading into the Day of the Dead celebrations, November first and second. So, we had a lot of folks come out to make little recuerdos- memorials for their loved ones or loved animals that have passed. And so that was really well done. And then we have a map in El Centro where people can take pictures of themselves and write. It's a map of Latin America and take a picture and then connect themselves to where their ancestors have come from in Latin America.\

BETHANY: Oh wow.

JAMILE: Yeah. So that's kind of cool. And we've had a first gen transfer and Freshman Social, which was good. We had umm our big event was a Latina Unity celebration, where we honored a campus faculty or staff, student and student org within the Latina community. And, you know, our space was full, which was great, you know, and we got to honor students and people who are doing leadership here on campus for the community. So that was a really good event as well. I

think we had over 30 people come to that as well. So, and someone who brought their dad, which we love to see.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: So yeah, so those things I think we're doing. And again, I'm working. We have study hours and. We are we're getting a counselor. Our counselor in the CCLC, Jesse has a couple of drop in hours in the CCLC, and he's going to give us 1 hour a week in El Centro. So, he'll be available for students to talk about mental health, which is a really important conversation. But sometimes in the Latinx community, there's a stigma. Against it, you don't have bad mental health. Get depressed, you know.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: Get up and go clean something. You'll feel better. Like You really talk about it.

BETHANY: Yeah no. like really talk about it.

JAMILE: It's not really. And I think again, I think it's a survival thing. Like, when you are surviving, you don't have a lot of time to worry about mental health. You have to worry about I need to pay this rent, and I need to feed these kids. And I don't have that privilege, right? Of being. And that's attention too that students can sometimes feel. Man, I am very privileged, even though I know, like, in comparison, I'm not, but in comparison to what I left. Like, I'm super privileged. Like, I can worry about my mental health, and maybe I have my own space, cause some students that I've met over the years, they didn't have their own space. And once they left, they didn't have a space to go back to. Like, they had to sleep in the living room over vacation cause someone else took over their room, you know, 'cause you have multigenerational families and one space. So, umm gosh, I God, I'm so rambling this morning. Um, yeah. So, umm what was the question?

BETHANY: I was asking if you could explain more, like, the programs you guys have done already at the center.

JAMILE: Yeah. And I think I did that. I just did a tangent, sorry about that.

BETHANY: It's okay. I like that. As well as, you know, you were saying that I'm assuming maybe, like, your programs that your events are for celebrating within the community are probably going to be your biggest hits.

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: As well as just. you hope for more for all your events as well?

JAMILE: Oh, yeah. For sure.

BETHANY: Or other events.

JAMILE: I think my thing would be that I want. Uh once we have robust tutoring, because right now we're offering Spanish and writing, and they're not necessarily I mean, most folks speak English. You know.

BETHANY: Yeah.

JAMILE: And a lot of our folks are kind of bilingual, not everyone, right? I don't want to paint with a wide brush, but a lot of folks are bilingual because they learn the language at home, you know?

BETHANY: Uhm.

JAMILE: And so there's not a huge So today, we're having Yo Sabo- Samantha, to play a Spanish game, right? So something where we can use our tutor, so they're not, you know, not being utilized because we are paying for them, you know.

BETHANY: Uhm.

JAMILE: Umm And so I would love to see us eventually have, like a robust roster of tutoring services there and that students are using them consistently. And for example, UC Davis, El Centro, they have study jams every time for finals. They'll have several days of, like, study hours where people can come. And eat snacks and study together. And right now, we're only doing like hours, like, study hours because that's what we can afford, right? And we have to be so careful with money, like, I mean, to be honest with you, like, I buy stuff out of my own pocket so that we'll have enough to last us throughout the whole month in terms of snacks and things, because those are things that draw students into the space too. And so, I want us to have a good budget, and I'd love us to be able to offer students more and more in terms of, you know, resources. So, like, right now, the career center is down to a counselor and a half, you know, and before because we were working with someone else, and he left to do another job, which I totally appreciate, but he was going to be our person, you know, in the career center who was going to come to El Centro and do uh workshops. So again, we just have to like, pivot and find alternatives, um but it can be a challenge, too.

BETHANY: So, as we're talking about El Centro, how many people exactly are a part of your guys' organization? And, like, what do they do exactly?

JAMILE: Yeah. So, there's myself, one graduate student assistant, Ermelindo Salgado [Hernandez], and then four staff. So, there's six of us who are running the center right now. And all the student staff, I have Alma [Karina Miranda-Rodriguez], Eric [Galvan], Yasmin [Rubio], and Paola [Garcia], and they are programmers. So, they're the ones who put on the events, create the marketing, host people when we're having [events]. So, there's six of us in the space. And they're the ones who are responsible for helping me put on the events and get the services out to people, maintaining the space, welcoming people, running events, that kind of thing.

BETHANY: Okay. Umm. Would you open up, like, more, like opportunities for students to, like, work in the center as well, or is it just like for now, it's just going to be the six of you?

JAMILE: For now, it's just the six of us because again, we're limited by budget. My student staff budget is the biggest part of our expenses for the whole academic year. And we try to hire students who have work study, so we're not paying absolutely everything. But by November all my work study students, they're going to, they're going to wipe out all their work study. So, all the rest of their salary is going to come out of our programming budget. And so, if we have less programming dollars, because we always want to prioritize students, right? Because some students depend on their salaries, right? For all their needs, for their bills, for their rent, for, you know, whatever else they're taking care of to help families, things like that. Excuse me. So, I don't begrudge students, but that means that I have less money for programs, right? So, I can't necessarily buy a ton of food or so that's when or snacks, and that's when our collaborations come in or I'm writing for like the student learning fee and the governor boards grant. Those things can be important to us because it helps us fund- Like, if we get the student learning fee, maybe I can pay for more tutors. Right? And if we get the governor's board grant, I run, I also run a program called the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program. And it's for students who want to go into student affairs as a career, students of color who want to go into student affairs. And the conference is involved in that. And so, we have to pay for that too for our seniors to come. And so, I mean, if you're not really aware, like, student affairs, these kinds of programs are expensive. And um, the bulk of that is paying for students. So, I couldn't really take on any more staff if I wanted to because I don't have the funds for it. There are students, though, and I so appreciate them who are there in the space and are like, do you need help? Like, we're setting up this room, and they'll just jump in and volunteer. And, like, that is really appreciated because without them, you know, we're doing it all ourselves. So, but also, that does help me look to the future. Like, the student is willing to just jump in, even if they're not getting paid for it. And so those are maybe people like earmark for leaders for the following year.

BETHANY: Mm hmm. Well, leading with that, would you think of possibly, like having your center also, like, set up like a volunteer like, hour like, it's hard to explain.

JAMILE: Yeah no. I know what you're saying. Yeah.

BETHANY: Set up something for that, so that students on campus that need the work can just volunteer. Do you think like

JAMILE: Yeah.

BETHANY: An alternative that you guys could set up in the center?

JAMILE: It's really when I was in the CCLC, we had an internship program that was unpaid. But now we're really moving against that cause. *Thank you.* Um because students are organized students, our student workers are organizing with unions and stuff. And so, we're really trying to be mindful of being mindful of not paying students for their work because that's not really appropriate. And so that would be that tension with a volunteer program because when we had in the CCLC, I was running their internship program, and it was an unpaid experience, and you got leadership experience, and then you were considered for a paid position the following year because as an intern, you kind of learned how to program. You learned how the CCLC functions. You did some of the work. But because we were unpaid and we weren't offering, like a unit or something like that, it wasn't really approved of. And so last year was really the last year that we ran the internship program. And so, I imagine maybe a volunteer program would be similar to that. Like, there's a real tension of not paying not paying students for work that they're doing. So, I mean, you have to give students something, whether it's a unit or something. And so unpaid work is not really something where we can, we can really pursue that much. But it happens, I think, like, informally.

BETHANY: Yeah. Yeah, I see what you mean with that. I mean, but that's kind of, like, one of the downsides, too, which, hopefully, at some point, as you guys get more ground in your program. We'll probably have something close to that, where you can promise this.

JAMILE: Yeah. That's great. Yeah. Well, I mean, I think if you're part of our mentorship program and you go through the mentorship program, you will we are saying that we will give you extra consideration for being an employee for the following year. So, we're hoping to launch the internship program next year. But right now, we've got more people interested in being a mentor than being a mentee, so that's a challenge.

BETHANY: So, moving forward, are there any goals that you have besides maybe, like, budget wise?

JAMILE: Yeah. Well, I mean, again, I think I want the space to be effective, right? We want to be a hub of student success and student retention. I want students to use the space to find resources there that are useful and important to them. I want them to feel like the space is a home away from home and comforting and healing for them in a space where they have umm ownership of, like, they can feel ownership over Chico State as an organization, an institution where their voices are heard, and they have a stake in the future of the campus because of it. But I think just fundamentally, I want students to feel like we were a tool in their success and their journey.

BETHANY: Um. So, as well as you saying that, like, have you talked to, like, the CCLC, and, I think there's also the Black Student Union as well like to see what works best for them, and like there anything you can, like, take leach from them, I guess?

JAMILE: Yeah, well, I think because I worked in the CCLC and program there, I've taken a lot of, like, what worked from the CCLC to inform, like, let's be visible on campus. And, like, all of the cultural centers have started. Well, the Pita Center is still up and gonna get established in their space hopefully by the spring.

BETHANY: Oh wow, ok.

JAMILE: Yeah. So, the Asian American Pacific Islander, Desi American Center should be opened in the spring. But we are all under the umbrella of the CCLC. So, we're kind of a collective. So, we're working together kind of in terms of our director is the director of all of us, of all the spaces. And so we often talk to each other like yesterday, I went over to Darnell Lee, who's the coordinator of the Black Resource Center, because I read and UC Davis, they have in El Centro, they have a course where they offered two units for students who have been put on academic probation. So, it's essentially like, Okay, we're here. How can we get out of this space? How can you be successful? And is like this a setback that you can just make part of your journey? It doesn't have to end your academic career or your time here. And so, what can we do? Like, I was talking to Darnell because he came out of REACH, right? And they worked a lot with academic success and retention. And so, what I wanted to ask him, what are some things that you used to do there? And then can we incorporate them in the work here for our students, whether they're Latinx or they're African American who have landed in academic um probation? What can we do? We can't offer a class, right? We don't have that capacity, and we don't have curriculum, either, right? It's very kind of extensive. But the Men of Chico, which is a men of color class, maybe we'll have that capacity, but in the meantime, can we do, like a one day seminar to help students who are in academic probation process that? Because there can be a lot of shame. A lot of fear, a lot of sense of failure if you land in academic probation in your first year, but it's a very common experience, you know, and so taking away some of that stigma

together. So, things like that, right? So when you have a team that is not necessarily in your space, but is doing the similar work, you can use each other as sounding boards where you find a great idea, and you're like, How can we do this? How can we do this here and for our students, given the resources that we have?

BETHANY: Mhm Yeah. And then this is more of like a side question for you. But as you are working with like El Centro, do you guys ever reach out to, like, EOP or Trio and, like, have your students, like, reach out to them with you? Like Yeah resource.

JAMILE: Yeah. Well, EOP, you can only join when you apply to the university. So, it's like, if if you didn't apply as a freshman, that's closed to you. Like, it's done. It's part of the application process to be admitted to the university, and they don't accept students mid-year. So that's the cut off there. And Trio, I actually just met with their director to see if we could collaborate on some workshops. I just was like curious. What do you do with your students? And can we collaborate on some things together? And so, I have already assigned my students. Okay, please reach out to a Trio, and let's see if we can get this stuff. Like, they do goes and classes. So, like an academic advising workshop, and they do organizing your life, and like, Okay, we could do that. Let's see what we can do with them. And so, yes. So again, those partnerships are important because they can extend the reach of what we're doing. And they have very specific roles, Trio SS, like, they can't buy food. Like, it's just but we can, right? And so, let's and then, yeah, we'll do a workshop and have your students come to our space and get familiar with our space. So even though they have their own space. So I mean, I think sometimes it takes a certain kind of generosity from professional staff to want to do that because you can become very, like, umm, guarded and careful over your space, you know, And I totally get that, you know, but also, you want to extend your reach, too. Yeah.

BETHANY: And then, again, looking forward, are you guys go- to have more do you guys possibly have, like, social media outreach?

JAMILE: We do.

BETHANY: How you guys tabled on campus?

JAMILE: Yeah, we have social media. We have TikTok, we have Instagram. Nobody uses Facebook, but we have it anyway. And we are going to start tabling, hopefully this week. Our students have a schedule. It can be hard because there's only five of us. So, if there's not everybody's in the office at the same time, and so if somebody's tabling, that means the front desk isn't covered, too. You know? So, with a small staff, it's like, you have to try to balance those things. So, we try to table when everybody's there, but it may be at, like, a weird time, like 2:30 in the afternoon, you know, and who's really out there at 2:30 in the afternoon sometimes.

So, we're doing our best, but yeah, we're trying to get the word out. And I think part of that is, like, the successful events and like, oh, I want to go eat the tamales, you know, and, oh, I want to go have pan dulce. And oh, they have free coffee all the time. Like, Yeah, let's go do that. And so, we do have some students who now have made El Centro, like, a normal part of their day, which makes me very happy, you know, and so, yeah, we're trying everything. The way I say is, we're just throwing things at a wall and seeing what sticks, and if it doesn't work, we're gonna just keep it pushing.

BETHANY: Well, that's a very great message. I wish El Centro to very much thrive because I know that these spaces are very important. Like, I've visited the Black Union Center, and it's a great place, and I'm glad that they're starting to open up our like Asian American industry, all of that. I'm so happy for that. Okay. But thank you so much for this interview

JAMILE: Yes, thank you.

BETHANY: with my partner, Braden Horner,

JAMILE: Yes.

BETHANY: Myself Bethany McCarroll today on October 29 at 9:30. Thank you so much.

JAMILE: Thank you both so much. Bye.

BETHANY: Bye.