

Interviewee: Adelfa Ukenye

Interviewer: Merlyn Morales

Date: February 25,2022

MM: This is Merlyn Morales interviewing assistant director of financial aid office, Adelfa Ukenye at Florida International University on February 25th, 2022, for EDH 6061 History of Higher Education course oral history project surrounding Florida International university is our middle name for the Master program of Higher Education Administration. Good afternoon, Adelfa.

AU: Good afternoon.

MM: How are you today?

AU: Excellent and you?

MM: I'm doing well myself. I wanted to go ahead and start the interview and I wanted to ask you to tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? What do you enjoy doing?

AU: So, my name is AU:Ukenye, I was born in Havana, Cuba, August 24th, 1965. I am the middle child of three siblings, older sister, older brother, and a younger sister.

MM: And what did you enjoy doing while you were growing up there?

AU: I enjoy reading. I was a little bit of a nerd, so I wasn't very social, but I liked to read, and I like to play with my sisters. That's basically it not much going on back then.

MM: The good old times.

AU: Yup.

MM: Why did your family migrate from Cuba to the US? When? and how?

AU: Oh my gosh, no, this is painful. Well, back in what, 1980, June of 1980 during the Mariel boatlift, we left for a better life. It was a horrible journey. The Mariel is an area where they kept all the people that were leaving Cuba. For a week we were all placed in a tent on the beach. So, the tent, you were sleeping on the sand, it was my dad, my two sisters and myself, my mom and my brother. And then when they were checking our papers, they said only my dad, my two sisters and myself could travel. My mom and my brother had to stay back. So, we did. We got separated because of my brother, had military age and you couldn't leave Cuba. So, my mom stayed with my brother for 15 years. I didn't see her.

MM: Oh, wow. That is so sad.

AU: That just decided so sad for me. Then we came to this country, just my dad, my older sisters, my younger sister, and myself. He had like 20 jobs to send money to Cuba. And we were by ourselves. We used to live in Sweetwater. And so, we came for a better life. It was tough. For 15 years it was just not like seeing, we were super young. And it's just from seeing your parents today to not seeing your parents two hours later and then for 15 years. And then finally my brother did the military thing that they do in Cuba. And they were able to bring them 15 years later. My mom and my brother.

MM: Thankfully.

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AU: A better life.

MM: Yes. And what is the military?

AU: So, in Cuba, I don't know if they have it now, but in Cuba for males, once they hit 18, they have to spend I don't think they have it now, but they have to go into the military, not military but some of like an army reserve and I don't know for how many years. And then they have to pass through and be released. And then after that, they can try to leave the country. But either you can leave Cuba if you're a male, if you're young, but once you were in between 18 to 21 or whatever, you won't be able to leave the country unless you show certificate that you passed. Okay. And so that's what happened. I don't know if they still have it now, but that's how it was before. So, we spend 15 years without having my mom here, and we were raising ourselves and doing the best we could. And my dad wasn't there all the time because he had to work. [Males 18-21 had to go through Cuban militia training, if they attempted to leave Cuba, they could not. Cubans were not allowed to leave Cuba. The Mariel Boatlift was one of the times through history where the Cuban government opened and let Cubans leave the island.]

MM: Right. It's tough.

AU: It's horrible.

MM: And then how did you come to be affiliated with FIU and what brought you here?

AU: So, I graduated from Miami Dade college many, many years ago. And then, I transfer to FIU, and I liked it so much here. And, I always said I wanted to work here. And so as far as a student I transferred from MDC, but I'm not sure if you want to know, what brought you here as an employee?

MM: Yes, of course. Tell me.

AU: So, I always wanted to work here. So exactly 23 years ago, I applied for financial aid coordinator position, and I was interviewed, and then I was given the position. I was told that I was hired at a FASFA conference. So back then the financial aid director, her name was Ana Sarasti, saw me at the conference and pulled me aside and said, you've been hired.

MM: So, it's like a great networking event.

AU: Yeah. It was a, an event of her letting me know that I was hired. And so that's how I started working here 23 and a half years ago.

MM: Wow, that's awesome. What was the thing that attracted you to FIU that made you want to come here?

AU: I had different perspective of where I wanted to go, but I wanted to stay closer to my parents, back then. And so, the closest thing was the university. So, one of the reasons I would say that I chose FIU was because it was very close to them. Otherwise, I would have probably, maybe, gone somewhere else.

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MM: Yeah, I think that comes with our culture as well. And then like you said that you were away from them for so long having any opportunity to stay close, its important.

AU: Right.

MM: What graduate degrees did you obtain from FIU?

AU: I received a bachelor's degree in Finance and International Business.

MM: What roles have you had since then at FIU?

AU: So, I was hired as a Financial Aid Advisor and then a few years after that I was promoted to Assistant Director, but when I was hired as a Financial Aid Advisor, back then we would answer the phones and at the same time, we got a program to manage. We will see students, we have counter time, you know, the front counter back then or the front office, but it was actually a front window. [Narrator Clarification: One-stop did not exist then. Students would come to the Financial Aid Office in the PC (Primera Casa) building for all their Financial Aid, Registrars, Admissions needs and questions.]

MM: Oh okay, and then how is that different to now?

AU: Now we don't have a window. We used to have a counter area or lobby area where we would just bring in the students or the students will come in and they will see customer service in the front. Now that area has been closed. Customer service has been transferred to what is called the one-stop office. And now what we do is that we do processing only. [Narrator Clarification: Financial Aid in the PC (Primera Casa) building is just the student Financial Aid processing office, processing all student forms or request submitted behind the scenes. Students go to the One Stop office in the new SACS building for their customer service needs. Students who call for assistance or come in person are attended by the One-Stop Office. It's no longer one office doing all the tasks, they have been divided, to better serve the university population.]

MM: Oh, okay. That is a lot different.

AU: It's a lot different.

MM: What do you believe have been some of the most impactful events or moments during your time with FIU?

AU: One of the most impactful times here at FIU I would say was when the university was able to bring in the law school, the medical school that was impactful to me.

MM: Do you remember around what time that happened?

AU: I would say maybe, I don't know then also in the medical school, I don't know if it's been 10 years already.

[The FIU Medical School was founded in 2006.]

MM: I'm not, I'm not sure.

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AU: I don't remember, but maybe at least close to 10 years or maybe a little bit more than 10 years. That was very impactful to the university to be able to, to know that I was here during that time.

MM: And how was that impactful for you?

AU: Well, it was an important event for the university being the fact that we have been, our university for a very long time, being able to say that FIU not only has graduate and undergraduate program, but also have professional programs just like the law school the medical school. So, to me, I think that was an amazing thing that happened at that time.

MM: So just bringing in more of a population of students have more diversity on the campus to be able to offer more programs?

AU: That's correct.

MM: What is your favorite memory at FIU?

AU: My most favorite memory of FIU that obviously, well, not obviously because you don't know, but I met my husband here, so you made a big, big, big impact. So, we were both Panthers and then we had, you know, our child, he graduated from high school, and he was, he's also a Panther. So, every time I think about FIU, I think about him. Of course, that was one of the best times.

MM: How did you guys meet? That's so sweet.

AU: [Hehe] He, he was a student athlete. He was a soccer player. He used to play professional soccer in Nigeria, which he's from, and we met an event here on campus. If you ask him, he's going to say I was a groupie, but it's not true. Cause I had no idea it wasn't happening. And, uh, from the stories that he tells me is that I used to go to the library every night and then Saturdays and Sundays I would go study and he would see me going up and down the stairs and he liked me, but he never said anything. And I would just go in through the door, go up to the second floor to a room in the corner. And then when I was hungry, I would get some cookies and milk and he knew all those details. And so, until one day I went to return a book and then how that's, how everything started.

MM: That's beautiful. And then your son also came here.

AU: That's correct.

MM: You guys are a proud FIU Panther family.

AU: We are.

MM: That's awesome. What are you most proud of having accomplished during your time at FIU?

AU: During, during my time at FIU, I'm most proud to be able to have brought to FIU the student employment week celebration. I brought it to FIU maybe about 11 years ago. It always existed, but FIU didn't they didn't even know that it existed. So, after so many

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years of working here and talking about it with, with the higher ups, they finally were able to allow me to bring the event to the university. So, we've been a success from the beginning and we're celebrating our 12th year this year. So that's one of my proudest moments that that event will be attached to my name, And that's a good thing

MM: Congratulations. And what goes on during this event? How long is it? What do the students do? Are they involved?

AU: So, the colleges and universities celebrate the unemployment week, the first week of April. And so that week we celebrate our students, the efforts, what they bring to the university. He at FIU, we celebrate the students that week, uh, with different events, also with employment opportunities, with resume writing, lots of different events that are beneficial to the students. And at the end of the week, we do a big celebration and we, departments get to nominate their students throughout the week. And at the end of the week, we do a big celebration, and we choose the winner of the year of the student that will yield a year. And so that's how been happening now for 12 years. So, it's just a week to celebrate our students. I'm a true believer that the university could not operate without our student employees they're everywhere. And they are, uh, 30% of our, of full-time employees. 30% of those employees are student employees. And so, we have a lot, a lot of students working for us.

MM: That's such a great way to include our student body in the work that we do here at the university daily. I wanted to move on to the sorts of changes you have maybe observed at FIU or in the surrounding community during your time here. So, what changes have you seen while you have been at FIU in the university and the surrounding communities.

AU: In the surrounding community, we can externally see how we have grown, uh, where we are located. We are located in the center of this area, which is Sweetwater, south Miami, and the university has four major entrances. For those of us that live around this area, you can come into FIU through either the intersection of eighth street or 24th street or and 117th avenue or a 107 avenue. So, we are in the center of this area. We have been FIU was, have been FIU since 1965. So when, when I was a student, it was big and now it's even bigger, not only in the number of buildings that we have and not only, um, the amenities that we have for the students, but also the student's population. When I started working here, we were 30,000 students and now we are almost 50 or more. And so, it has grown.

MM: Do you remember how many buildings maybe there was on campus when you first got here?

AU: [uhm...] It was big already. I would say maybe more than 10 now we have more than 20 and counting. So, it would be even bigger now.

MM: With different student populations, have you worked with?

AU: I have worked with Native students, obviously US citizens, uh, immigrants, and then international students. Now we don't see in our office, we don't see that many international students because obviously they're not eligible for federal aid, but we used to see quite a few scholarships back then in our office, we used to process scholarships. Students would just do drop off the checks here, like now we have a scholarship office.

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So, I have come across maybe students, immigrants, and international students, and we still do.

MM: So that's a big part of the FIU population. You would say you've reached?

AU: Yes, a combination of the three, yes, I would say yes.

MM: Okay. We often hear that international is FIU's use middle name, what does the I in Florida International University mean to you and why?

AU: I, to be honest, I always wondered the meaning of international, but I can say from what I learned from you, what it meant and how it was created, it makes sense to me because back then, there's, you know, trying to bring in students from, from all over then the, the meaning of international. But when I transferred to FIU, I personally thought that the international meant that the majority of the students were international. When in reality it was not, it was just a name because the university would house all kinds of students, but the name is still there. So, I wonder how many students, even today assume that this school is just for international students.

MM: Previously, you mentioned, you met your husband here at FIU and he was from Nigeria. How would you think your husband would reflect on FIU as an International University?

AU: I'm sure that for him probably will be different for the fact that he an international student and because he was an athlete and he did his first two years in Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Allegheny, community college. And then he was recruited to all beginning to play soccer and then FIU recruited him to play soccer and got a scholarship. So, I guess outside international student, most likely his perspective was probably a little different. But then he told me that the reason why he chose FIU, even though there were several schools were trying to recruitment recruit him because he was a pretty good soccer player, is that the coach told him that he was suggest he comes to Miami because of the sun. The weather will be better. Most schools, including Pittsburgh, where he was living was freezing. So, the coach basically put FIU on scope for him because of the weather and who can, who can beat Miami, whether, you know,

MM: [laughter] I agree.

AU: And then he chose FIU and then thankfully he chose FIU, and we met.

MM: Yay.

AU: That's my buddy.

MM: Being of Cuban descent, being Hispanic. Did the word international stand out to you when you wanted to come to FIU and being an employee here?

AU: No, I honestly, I would say no, it's not my association. I just know that when I, I was at Miami Dade college and I did my research, I was just attracted to FIU. And so, I decided to transfer to FIU, but not because of like, thinking that okay. It's associated to where it come from. It's just that, I just like what I saw.

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MM: Okay. And so, do you feel that this is an international campus?

AU: The university is, I would not say just international. The university is it's just a university that is homogeneous. So, you will find just like any other university, you will, you will just find, you will find Native students, US citizens, you would find immigrants that you will find international students. It's just, and I have been exposed to other colleges and universities, and I don't see the difference of what we are to who we are as far as the students that attend the university. And so, I would say that we have everything.

MM: So, would you say that compared to other universities and campuses is, are FIU university have a bigger population of a certain type of student? So maybe we have more of a Hispanic population versus other universities?

AU: I don't really know the record on percentages of the type of students that we have, But I well I'm going to assume that we have a large population of immigrant. I mean.

MM: During your time here, is that what you have seen?

AU: When I was a student, or an employee?

MM: Both, your entire time, here at FIU.

AU: When I was a student, I really thought that everybody was international [laughter] Because I really met a lot of international students. I don't know if it was a coincidence. And then now that I'm an employee, I see the other side and there's just all kinds of students.

MM: So, you would think that before, when you first started, it was more of an, a grasp to international students than it is compared to now?

AU: [Inaudible] I was just a student. So, since I was, mingling with international students, I thought that it was, most of these were international. [laughter]

MM: Oh okay.

AU: But I don't know if it was just me, coincidentally, most people I knew were international, maybe because I was part of the college of business and maybe they were a lot of international students, in the college of business, but I, I wouldn't think that most students were international back then. Just like, it is now, I'm sure.

MM: You believe FIU offers enough programs to international students?

AU: I don't think, and again, I'm not in that area of academics, but I don't think that FIU divides their program based on whether you, we haven't international students or not. I think that I am assuming that the programming, the majors are in general for just any students to choose a career.

MM: Okay. And how do you feel if you has changed or formed over the past 20 years?

AU: The universities, I would say my perception is the university has changed on the perspective that obviously we have more students, but overall, and then we know that we have

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obviously the law school and the medical school, but overall, I think [inaudible] I don't know if we changed that much.

MM: You just think that we've changed in like in expansion?

AU: We have changed as part of the expansion. Yes, we have changed. And having more students, we have changed on having and adding medical school and the law school. But I think we can, we can do more is to its 2022 and I think we can definitely do more.

MM: When you say do more, what do you mean?

AU: I think that we need to, as a university, we need to expose FIU branding, branding. That's what I was looking for. FIU needs to improve the branding, meaning that we should be able to go to any store within the area within Florida, within at least the east of the United States. When you leave Florida and you go to, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and then all the way up, you should be able to find FIU merchandise. So, what the university needs to improve is branding.

MM: How do you think the university can brand themselves or how you think they are not meeting their full potential in branding?

AU: No, you touch my Achilles heel because this is one of the reasons why I just feel a certain way and so, branding is important. So, then the whole world first, the whole country would know who we are. And then the whole world would know who we are. I do not want to go out of Florida and say that I'm from Miami and people automatically think of the university of Miami. I have nothing against the University of Miami. I just have a feeling just because they, everybody outside Florida, thinks that the only university of Miami is university of Miami. And so that is because the branding that is because when you turn the TV on for football games, basketball games, you, they are featured whether they win or lose, we're not. And so also, we, there's no reason why. If someone wants to buy FIU merchandise, they need to drive to this campus. So, the Biscayne Bay campus away from the bookstore to be open, to buy merchandise from FIU. However, you go across the street here at 107, then you can buy a CVS and Walgreens, all Walgreens. UM merchandise. I'm not picking on UM still as an example, that.

MM: Is true.

AU: When you drive through coral Gables, God forbid you don't see orange and teal. [laughter] And all you see around that area. Even if you go to the Denny's across the street from them or Chilies, it's all UM stuff. The same thing needs to happen with FIU. We have been here longer than they have. [Narrator Clarification: Adelfa's passion for FIU and their current state of branding led her to mistakenly refer to FIU as "older than UM"] And so, branding is a pet peeve for me. We got to do something about branding. And hopefully when we wake up and decide to do branding, we then decide to change the name also, where we can drop the international and name it something else.

MM: Would you name it? If it wasn't Florida International University?

AU: Maybe Florida, maybe Florida University of Miami?

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MM: There's already a University of Miami.

AU: That's University of Miami. This is a university of Florida in Miami, but then this is UF So we will work on the...

MM: Work on the name. [laughter]

AU: The team in charge of branding. Should be able to come up with the name, just like that. But we hopefully when branding, when we decide to brand FIU outside the four, interceptions of eighth street coral away 107, 117th avenue that we, that same team work on the change, changing the name. I'm sure that we can come up with something.

MM: Do you think then if we do go ahead and change the name that will change the dynamic of the university, it will no longer, will no longer intake students of all nationalities?

AU: No accepting, admitting students have nothing to do with the name.

MM: But do you think students come to FIU because of that international name?

AU: I don't think so. I do not think that students from outside the world come to FIU because the name international is there. They come to FIU because we are recruiting. We are sending our recruiters to those countries. We could be named Florida in Miami, whatever, because students and the country and the state and the world would only know certain universities by sending recruitment there by same thing, video, not because of the name. And so, we got to move on from that international thing. I know many years ago, when, before you were born, there were thinking about changing the name. And I was so excited, and we were some names drop, and then that fell off. And so, branding is we, we, there is no reason why more states know about us. There's no reason why we are not walking into Kohl's and seeing FIU merchandise, you know, you can go into Kohl's and going to a corner, and there's a bunch of university stuff in there. Okay. [laughter] Um, so branding, I'm hoping that before I retired, that FIU's branding would just blow up.

MM: So then international is not a big part of FIU. You would say it doesn't make or break the university as we are now. And how we have established ourselves

AU: That I know of. I mean, maybe there's studies that I'm not aware of, but when you're recruiting, uh, maybe when the recruiters go outside the country to recruit, and they say Florida international university, that might catch the eye of the international student, but we're not the only university on your other ones that are not called international. And so...

MM: That's true.

AU: I don't think having international there have anything to do with anything, unless there's a study out there that I'm not aware of, but common sense tells me that is nothing to do with the international. That international has to go.

MM: Do you think FIU will continue expanding more campuses? And if so, where do you think would be a great location to continue expanding?

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AU: I don't, I think we are right because of branding. There's no need to expand what an additional campus. We just need to concentrate on branding to me once we are branded and we're known everywhere, then we worry about then adding a campus. Because once people know who you are and your existence, then you're going to help people everywhere that wants to come to FIU. So, then you increase the number of campuses, but right now it's okay with what we have until branding, But also hopefully sooner the better.

MM: Do you think in your time here that there has been a specific moment in which FIU could have established themselves as international?

AU: Establish ourselves as international? [Hmm] I think, and again, that's all-recruitment kind of question is I want, it depends on how we do our recruitment undergraduate and graduate. When we are recruiting, are we setting the university as an international university or are we just selling the university just as a university, as a whole? So, it all depends on how we do our recruitment, uh, through the, you know, the admissions office.

MM: So, it started at the beginning?

AU: Yes.

MM: Do you think there's another way we can establish ourselves as international, even without the name?

AU: Sure. We already established.

MM: In what way?

AU: Well, international, every time we go and recruit. So, I don't think again, there's any connection. I don't think that anyone, again, I don't know if this is some sort of study, but I am going to go on a limb and say that FIU will not have any problems recruiting international students. If the international it gets dropped off from Florida international university, [inaudible] students are smarter than that. I mean, I don't believe there's anybody outside the US that says I'm going to choose FIU only because the international is there on less again, their studies. I do not know. I keep repeating the same thing. I don't know what I don't know, but common sense tells me that, uh, I don't believe that it would change to the negative changing the name.

MM: Okay. What can the university do to better portray themselves as an international higher education university?

AU: As an international higher education. [Hmm] But why do we want to be known as an international higher education?

MM: Because FIU is Florida International University. So then what do you think that they can do to better portray themselves as being international?

AU: Well, I think we are already doing that if there is an FIU campus in China. So, if we have a campus in China, then maybe going, maybe we need to expand and then opening a

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campus the same way that we have it in China, that we should open campuses in other places in the world.

MM: Do you think many students know about our campuses in China? For me, that was the first time I heard about it.

AU: I don't know. I'm sure they do. I mean, when they, when they send the, um, the newsletter, the newsletter thing, I think, um, through the parents or when the president used to travel to those campuses, they would, I think there was sent some emails. I don't remember.

MM: I mean, I've been here since 2014 in my undergrad, and I never known that we had a campus in China. So, I think it goes back to your branding and promoting ourselves.

AU: Exactly. Exactly.

MM: Okay. Has there been any events or moments that helped you see FIU as an international university?...Has there been a specific event that FIU has thrown or anything that happened has happened in the university to promote their internationality?

AU: I mean, we, the university celebrates, uh, I would say in general, the university celebrates, um, the different type of students that we have, But I don't recall of any event that specifically celebrates international students.

MM: Okay.

AU: If they do, it's probably, probably they do with, through probably the, the international student department. Cause we do have one, but I don't recall, uh, seeing a celebration that specifically celebrating international students, even though we celebrate all students, but nothing specific that I have seen, maybe I missed something. I don't know.

MM: What strides, if any, have you seen FIU make to further work towards their title as Florida International University? So, in your time here, have you seen the university work or made any strides in making themselves known more internationally or making better of their name, Florida International University?

AU: If we have a campus in China, then I would think that's where this, the university has started to market themselves outside the United States as an international school. But I think that when the students are doing their research and they come across FIU us, then just the name itself may be a reason for them to say, okay. So, if I have an opportunity to go to the United States and I come across this school that has the word international, that probably that word would market itself for students that are living outside the United States and want to come to the us or they want to come to Florida, I guess.

MM: Do you think that FIU offers a space for those types of students? The students who come here because of the word international.

AU: Yes. I think they, they university welcomes all the students. I, one thing I don't feel about FIU, is that FIU excludes students. I think whether we have the name international in it or not, we are an all-inclusive university that we include all the students that we value all the students. That is my feeling. And I truly believe that we do include all the students that

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there's no separation. That's, that's what I truly believe in feel from all the years of not just being a student, but, uh, also being an employee.

MM: That's great. Having told me that the university welcomes all types of students and doesn't exclude any specific students. Can you say that you have never felt targeted as a minority population coming to FIU?

AU: When I, I would say no. I mean, I was a student here and there and um, I always felt welcomed. So no, as a matter of fact, it was very enjoyable to, to, um, be a student and mingling with so many international students, I think is fantastic.

MM: Do you believe it is important to have a diverse population of students in FIU and what are certain benefits of that?

AU: I absolutely believe diversity is important. Most universities should have diversity and what makes us so successful, I think what makes FIU so successful, It's the fact that we have so much diversity. I think that bringing students from other countries brings the knowledge to this country. The way education is in other countries is completely different, how it is here in the United States, a lot of international students, when they come in as freshmen for graduate students or PhD students, their knowledge is much greater than, and they're able to bring that knowledge to the university, which in turn, hopefully when they graduate, they stay here in the United States and make this country better. Which again, not only makes the university better, but he has made this country better. Having diversity that I believe.

MM: How has your view on FIU changed or stayed the same from the time you were a student to the time you were a full-time staff?

AU: Well, I was saying to someone the other day that even though I've been working here for 23 years and because of the fact that I was a student here, I'm invested. To me, FIU means different because I was a student here. So, um, um, even though it's been 23 years, I still love this place. I know that FIU has great potential to be 20 times better than we are now. And we're striving and working towards that. So, I am three vested to this university because I am part of, part of the history by being a student here.

MM: And how do you think we are striving for that goal? How is FIU moving forward?

AU: FIU is moving forward by first continue to strive to increase the number of students that we want to admit the university. FIU strides by not only increasing the number, but throughout the years, we have always also improved on the quality of students that we have, uh, admitted to the university. Um, in the past we used to be the alternative. Now we are recruiting, and we are meeting top notch students. So, we are no longer the backup. A lot of students that we are admitting are, are first in their class, second their class. And so, we are striving to bring the best of the best. And I being that we are in financial aid, I could see that the quality of students have improved tremendously.

MM: How has the office of financial aid in terms of policies changed over the years?

AU: Because we, um, because we award federal aid, aside from institutional aid and scholarships, when it comes to federal aid, we don't make the rules and regulations.

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Those are established by the federal government. So we have, it has become easier from the way that we use to process financial aid in the past through the way that we are accomplishing to process financial aid, to be able to, to have more students awarded faster is that the system has improved the, um, the quality of the way that we manage here in financial aid, the system, the way that we operate the system, um, the way that we try to do more of a system process than in manual process, because in the past we have to process financial aid for 30,000 plus students by reports one by one. And that has improved the more automatic processing that we do in financial aid, the faster we're going to award the students that we have more of a satisfied community, because at the end of the day, the students just wants their financial aid processed, uh, the faster that we do that the better. And then you have a happier customer so that I can say that we have improved tremendously.

MM: Have you noticed a change in student need for financial aid over the years?

AU: The student need hasn't changed. What has changed is that students are now more aware of what they can receive. And so, in up it's just, the students are getting more sophisticated. The new generation is getting more sophisticated because they're more exposed to information due to social media and all the different avenues. And so, what happens in the past, the students had to read and search in a different way. They have to go to the library. Now, all the information is on the tip of their other fingers. So, the students are becoming more savvy because it's easier to find the information.

MM: Okay. That's good. So, going, do you think the university has taken the right steps on informing students of the financial aid opportunities offered?

AU: I think we have. I think the university in coming from enrollment services and coming from our office, yes, we are doing a very good job on publicizing financial aid. And we can see the difference when we do open house. Like we did this past Saturday where it's just, the students are more aware to the students and the parents are more aware now of financial aid, what is available than before when I was a student.

MM: And why do you think that is

AU: Because of the exposure to social media, because of the way in, uh, accommodating the, the way that that people read the news, um, which is text messages and, uh, and emails and Facebook and Instagram. I mean, because of that and the government also with the phosphate application, going with an app, which is much easier where you can go on your phone or on your devices and file the FASFA unlike before you have to sit in front of the computer, nevertheless, you have to do a paper, but then you have to then move down from paper to only being able to log into the laptop, going through their website and complete the FASFA. Now with them creating an app, absolutely magnificent, absolutely magnificent, making it easier for students and parents to, uh, complete the FASFA. Also, another thing that was wonderful was not only the app, but then moving the FASFA being available from January to October was also a smart move and even better was to then not have the students to have to wait until they file taxes in January, going back to two years, using the taxes, the students don't have the excuse of, okay, I can't do my FAFSA because I haven't filed my taxes so,

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MM: So, they structured it in a way that it was beneficial for the student and made it easier for them to complete and access.

AU: Correct. That's correct.

MM: Do you believe FIU has invested enough time and resources to develop the future generation, maybe having more leadership programs, opportunity for students and employees?

AU: FIU does have those opportunities and FIU has alumni's everywhere that are successful.

MM: Good. So going back to your time here, I know that you've been here over 20 years. What, since you have been here during, for over 20 years and you've gone through different, uh, FIU presidents, what is it, or what have the presidents, have you given FIU to make FIU more of an international university? Do you think that since you've been here with different presidencies, have different presidents impacted the view of others on Florida international university?

AU: When I came in, the president that was here at that time was, uh, Dr. Modesto Maidique. He was very innovative and, uh, he's the one that brought in the law school and the medical school. So, he had a vision because I always, like I say, I know that FIU has so much potential. So, the good thing that I have seen systematically with him, and then when he retired Dr. Rosenberg, that they both have a vision, visionaries that they have, they known, where FIU can be. And so, they have done, I have seen them do the possible and the impossible to be able to expose FIU to the rest of the world, to the rest of the country and then to the rest of the world.

MM: And specifically, what were those scenarios?

AU: Well, again, being exposed being for the fact that we have a campus in China, that is just, and I think that was established by Dr. Rosenberg. Um, prior to that, the previous president by us being able to have a law school in the medical school that opened the, um, that allowed all the people, all the students around the country and outside the country know that there's one more school near Florida that has a law school and the medical school. So, bringing the law school, bringing the medical school, uh, expose the university, I believe to two other international students.

MM: Okay. And how do you feel the outside communities view Florida international university?

AU: I think that we are well-respected, um, FIU has a tremendous reputation. Um, uh, students want to come here. Student wants to graduate from here. Uh, students want to promote FIU. Students want to let other people know about FIU. So not only the students but family. So, I, I know that we are very well-respected, but I know that we can do more and there's going to be more coming on sure now that we're transitioning to, to a new president very soon. [Narrator Correction: AU:sees students' passion for FIU but feel as if FIU needs to be better portray their branding]

MM: How do you think FIU came to be so well-respected and have a good reputation?

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AU: I would assume, that it has to do with majors that we offer the success of how many people we graduate, the, um, diversity. That's what made the university so successful also that we have operated on the type of students that we are admitting, um, because of our caliber of admissions, we are no longer the backup. Like many years ago, students would have a list of universities that they wanted to attend. And if I was a backup, we are no longer the backup because, you know, they still get admitted to FIU directly from high school is very difficult unlike before it wasn't so. And so, we were always the alternative

MM: And it makes it difficult to be accepted because of high qualifying scores, like SAT and ACT

AU: The caliber the caliber of students that we're admitting totally changed for the best.

MM: Yes. Based on your experience with FIU, what are your hopes and dreams for the future of FIU?

AU: I am hoping that I have high hopes and I have at least another 10 years before I decided to retire from the university. So, I am hoping that within, with the transition of now that university is trying to find a new president, I am hoping that that new president who would be somebody probably late forties, early fifties, somebody young, somebody that is, has some sort of connection with FIU, whether graduated from here. So when they graduated or graduated from FIU as a graduate, um, someone that is connected to FIU somehow, as an alumni, so that person is vested to the university and the heart of that person will be different, more com eh, that person will be more committed to take the university to the next level because they see the university in a different light because you have your best in you and your heart, part of your heart is with FIU. So, I'm hoping that we have, the new presidents is somebody connected with the university as a student.

MM: I think that's great. And I think that'll help FIU a lot. And having passion a lot behind your work is very important. So, that concludes our interview. And I want to thank you for your time. And I loved hearing about all of your stories and your time here at FIU. Thank you.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Merlyn Morales