

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

YP: So, thank you so much for accepted the interview. You know that this is for the oral history project for the class, with Dr. Kuntz. So basically, what we want about this interview is you can tell us a little about your experience here in the last decades So telling us, how was the experience, what kind of memories you have and so in these order of ideas we are going to start with the first question. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where did you grow up and what did you enjoy doing?

NG: Okay. So I am originally from Cuba, born in Cuba, and I came to Fort Lauderdale, the United States at the age of 12, and I went to junior high and high school in Fort Lauderdale. I came by myself without my parents to a boarding school, which was a very nice school. And when my mother finally came a year later, she taught at that school because she told me basically, that people, they can take away everything you own, which they did when we came from Cuba, but they cannot take away what's in your head and the degrees you have and how you're prepared. And so she got a job immediately teaching where I was going to school. I enjoy, um, I have a family and big family. I enjoy being with the family. I enjoy reading and I enjoy writing and I very much enjoy teaching.

YP: Okay, great. So can you tell me a little, how did you come to be affiliated with FIU? What brings you here?

NG: Um, because we were refugees basically when we came, we came with basically no funds. I wanted to go away to college, to Vermont, to Middlebury college, uh, to study languages, but that wasn't to be because we couldn't afford it. Even though I had a partial scholarship, we couldn't afford the trips and the books and everything else. So, I ended up going to Miami Dade college, um, which was a good choice. And I spent two years there and then FIU was about to open in 1972 because I graduated from Miami Dade college in 1972. And that particular FIU opened. And I thought I would have had to drive all the way to FAU, Florida, Atlantic and Boca, but they finished FIU. They opened and I was here the night, the day they opened, I was a night student evening student and I was here in the very first date opened. It was very exciting.

YP: That's amazing. And tell me about the roles that you have had at FIU?

NG: So first let me tell you that when I started, I have to tell you that I remember my very first class at FIU was taught by, uh, um, a professor by the name of Charles Elkins, who recently passed away. He worked for FIU after who was a professor who worked for FIU, uh, for many years. And I wanted to follow in his footsteps. He was an English teacher and I was majoring in English and he became like an associate provost or something. And he wasn't terrifically great role model. And, um, so I, um, after I graduated from, um, FIU, it took two years, right? So, I started in 72 and I thought there was only one building then by the way, Primera Casa building. And I said to myself, what are they going to paint that because I can send aware of that, that type of architecture really existed. But, um, it was very exciting. We started with over 5,000 students and everything was so new.

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

Everybody was so happy to be there. And so excited. Um, after I received, I earned my bachelor's in English, then I decided that I wanted to get a masters. And at that time, I didn't know whether I was going to go into teaching adults or training adults on some sort of corporate mode. So, I also enrolled and finished a master's in adult education at FIU. Um, then after that, I, um, FIU did not have any doctorate programs then. And, um, there were two universities that, uh, wanted to help if you establish programs. And they, what they wanted to do was come teach in Miami for the weekends. And the degree would, would their professors. And the degree would be from if I, from, from that particular and they were FSU and university of Florida, I chose university of Florida. Um, and I chose to get a degree in a doctorate in higher education administration. So that's what I did. I, I was working full time, uh, at FIU at that time, because in 1977, I started working full-time at FIU. I started in as a grant coordinator and later a grant director, I wrote up a whole bunch of grants for FIU and brought a lot of funds. I've got time. It was a lot easy, very easy to get title seven funds for training, um, for colleges and universities. So that was in 77, uh, where I started with the grants. And then I decided that I was contributing to contributing to my own temporality by putting myself into grants and decided to apply for a regular faculty position, which I got. And so, then I was a faculty member and I was also, I also had a Dean's grant.

YP: And it was, that was hard to get an affiliated position here?

NG: The, the, the Dean's grant, um, was a federal grant to try to teach all of the faculty that taught in the school of education, um, to understand multicultural concepts and how to teach multicultural students. And, and, and maybe students that were had transitioned from TESOL, you know, from English as second language into regular. So, I did that for a couple of years, and that was, and I'm looking at my resume because it's been a long time. So that was, uh, from, uh, let's see, that was from 77 through 88 that I was on the faculty, but no, no to 86 in 1986. Oh, by the way, I was in the, on the faculty teaching, uh, the TESOL at on, and the multicolor, um, bilingual and multicultural education, Adam. And then in 86, somebody asked me, uh, to apply for associate Dean of the office of undergraduate studies in the other campus, in the north campus, which was called Bella Vista Campus, that campus had a pretty name. So, I applied and I got that job. So, from 86 to 88, um, I was associate Dean there. And, um, then, um, after that I left, if I, but that was the end of my first life at FIU. I came back many years later. Um, let's see. Yeah. So, yeah. So, and you want me to tell you what, what happened when I came back? Because in between, in between, I was, uh, I had several positions in between. I was, uh, a vice-president for academic affairs at St. Thomas university from 88 to 95. Then from 95 to 98, I was a dean of arts and sciences at Nova Southeastern university after that from, uh, 98 to, oh, no, oops, I'm sorry. From 95 to 98. I was in Nova Southeastern and then from 98 to, oh, that's another side from 98 through. Um, let's see. Well, after notice how the certain, I went to Miami Dade college as a provost for academic and student affairs, I was a provost for five years. And then I was also a campus president of the Hialeah campus for a year there. And that was from 2004 to, so I was at Nova from 98 to 2004 in 2004, I went to Miami Dade college and, um, I retired from the state in 2010 and thought I was going to stay home and just write books, but it's kind of lonely and I'm a real social

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

person. And I miss teaching because I had been teaching all along when I was an administrator at night as an adjunct. Um, except when I was a provost, cause you couldn't really teach and do that at the same time. And then I decided to that I wanted, after a year, you have to stay out a year. If you retire from the state not to lose your, um, your pension. And then I decided I wanted to come back to teaching full-time, but I didn't want to be an administrator to I'd done that for 30 some years. And that was enough. So, um, I went to the first Florida Atlantic university called me and said, would you come teach here? So I did that for two years, from 2011 to the south and 13 in 2013, the Dean of the then Dean of the college of education daily. I got to see, I called me and asked me to apply. There was an open faculty position in higher education, which is really what I wanted to teach all along. So, I went ahead and put my name in and got the position. And so, I have been here teaching full-time from 2013 through present day. I also was for the first six years, I was, um, graduate program coordinator for project program director for the masters in higher ed for the doctorate in higher ed and for the certificate program in, in academic advising. And, um, we in and together with my colleagues while we started the online master's in higher ed. So that was my second life at FIU. So I think that I have started my life at FIU and I, my life at FIU as a professional, I tend to end it here.

YP: Yeah, Impressive Career, um, can you please tell me, what do you believe have been some of the most impactful events or moments during you time at FIU?

NG: Um, I think it's every graduation, uh, every graduation almost. I think I cry at most graduations here because especially my own, but no, I cry at every graduation that I go as faculty member, because I see my students that their dreams have come true and that they made it and that they've been successful. And those are my favorite moments, really, because that's what we're here for. And I see it as that. I'm just taking a torch and I'm handing it to the next generation. And especially since I teach higher ed administration, this is the generation that's going to deal with my grandchildren when they get to college. Good luck to them.

YP: Eh, where, okay. So, what sorts of changes have you observed at FIU or in the surrounding community during your time here?

NG: Well, I watched it grow from one building and one parking lot to what it is today. It's very impressive. And I also have watched the grow academically as far as now, we're a research one institution. When we, when I first started here as a faculty member, um, there were a lot of people whose first job as faculty member was here, but now we're much more sophisticated as far as we attract many, many great scholars to come teach here. And so academically we've grown immensely and richly and it's inspirational. Uh, so that's the biggest change. You know, the growth in the buildings, it's just buildings, but the growth academically and the quality of students, it's very impressive. And those I think are strong points. And also, that we're a Hispanic serving institution. Um, and my being Hispanic, I, I, I take pride in that. So, matter of fact, that was a, um, I would say

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

coal researcher, um, on a study of about 10 universities who graduate, who are successful in graduating, graduating minorities and I, and another colleague studied FIU and how they were successful in graduating Hispanics. What did they do that they were so successful? We found that they really did more for other minorities sent. They differ Hispanics because, um, and I'm talking, I'm talking about this book came out many years ago, so it was many years ago, but I think it still holds true in some form because a lot of the Hispanics that have come here, at least the ones that, that, that, that I'm familiar with have this credentialing, um, goal. They want to see what we call in Spanish at papelito that you can put in, uh, you know, the, the diploma you've been put on the wall. So until you get the elite donor, you can put on the wall and say, you finished, and you graduated. And so, they have that kind of taught to them. They have that inbred in them and the Hispanic community and the Cuban community in particular, because many of the Hispanic sec came in the 60, 70. So of course, were men mainly Cuban and then Venezuelans, et cetera. But many of the, particularly many of the Cubans felt that, um, they, this was, this was their chance to make it, this was their, they wanna make their home here. And, uh, and, and they, they had this drive to succeed and to get an education because education has always been important and being as this was a state university, we were looking enough to have a state university here where we didn't before. That was very important.

YP: Okay. And you are a woman, does it have any impact in your experience at FIU? How?

NG: Um, I never felt, uh, any difference at FIU. Um, I, have felt, and of course being Hispanic, I was, I never felt because there's so many Hispanics here. I never felt that I was a minority either. Um, but the only, the only, the only, um, thing I remember, and that is important and it wasn't here at FIU. I was interviewing for a presidency and the chairman of the board of that was on the interview Committee, asked me if I had asked my husband's permission to apply for this job. And he should have known better. He was an attorney, but I, I just smiled. And I said, you know, I think, you know that you can't, you shouldn't ask that question, however, I choose to answer it. So, you know, so yes, as a woman, you have to watch out that a you're getting, um, the same pay as someone that is, that has the same job and has the same background and has the same education and credentials because we're state university and all the salaries are public. Every time. For example, when I applied for the associate Dean's position, I made it my business to go into the, the books and everything, and find out what associate deans made and whether there was any difference, whether there were women that earn less than men, whatever. And I prepared myself to, for that interview and for that job. But so I've done that with every job that I've had. Okay.

YP: So now we're gonna start talking about this uh, idea about being international at FIU. so, because it was very important in the beginning of the, this university, when this university started um, that was, that has been like a big project of this university, being

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

international. So, I like to know what Does this "I" mean in FIU to you? So what this means, that concept of international.

NG: Um, it is good question, because I think when, um, we, our name says a lot because, uh, we have, we're very diverse institution as far as faculty and students and staff. Um, but it's interesting that, um, the international international nomenclature was, um, was surprising to some people because this is not just a state university for international students. And at first we didn't have that many international students. Now we do over over period of time, we'll have become known internationally as well. We have a campus Tianjin China, we have, uh, you know, we have sister, um, colleges and universities. So over there, I visited for example, in Argentina and so on. And so we, our students come here, faculty, uh, work with other faculty and other countries. We have study abroad programs. Now we didn't start out that way. At the beginning, there weren't that many study abroad programs here. As a matter of fact, my daughter started here attended FIU. And my daughter started here as a freshmen in the beginning of the freshmen class, because FIU started as juniors and seniors only the last two years. Then they added later on in the eighties, I think in the eighties, they added, um, the junior and senior. So they became, you know, four-year institution. And my daughter started in that first class, first class, she graduated from here and she studied international relations, which was part of arts and sciences then, which is now a separate, which is now an, a school within a school that is separate. That school is really a Testament to how we've grown with programs that we have with other institutions, with other countries. Um, and the degrees that we offer also have been varied. It isn't just international relations, just other things, specially in the college of business, everybody has like an international focus now most, most programs do. So we've grown tremendously in that, but I have to give you, um, I have to give you a little anecdote. That's very interesting. Um, when, um, three, I guess three precedents. I go, I've been here since the very first president, which was Charles Perry. Okay. But two, three precedents after that, I think two, three, the third one after Charles Perry was Modesto Madique and this campus is named after him when he didn't know about the I international, why is the I international? They're going to think we're just for international students. So he had the bright idea to say, maybe we should just be called Florida, Florida, Florida, university of Florida at Miami when the university of Florida, I don't think so. So, then he said, okay, I have another idea. Maybe we should be called Florida state university at Miami, Florida state university said, are you kidding me? Now? They were the two flagships, USF and FSU, and they didn't want anything to do with, um, you know, being, you know, lending their name. What he wanted to do was really change our name, to be more like a system like the university of California, the, you know, the state unit, you know, that's not the state university, but the university of California at LA, the university of California at blank, that's what he wanted to do, but that didn't work. So the, I stayed and I think it grew because it was good. You know, I almost feel part of the birthing of this, of this university as a student. And then my kids came here. My both my kids went to FIU. My daughter graduated from FIU. She's now a judge. She didn't go to law school at FIU because if you didn't have a law school, just like me, I couldn't get a

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

doctorate here because if I didn't have a doctorate, but, um, she went elsewhere and got her law degree, but she's very, very, we're both tied to the roots. And what we love about it is that we've seen it grows and we hurt when FIU hurts. Like, uh, you know, when the bridge thing happened¹, I went, by the way I went under that bridge twice an hour before it felt so, you know, it was, and when that happened, I felt so sad, not just for the life story loss, but for FIU, because, you know, we've, we've tried for S you know, many, many years to grow into be strong. And, and that was so I'm glad that we have now a place to celebrate or to honor the folks and especially our student that we lost there. But that was, um, that's what I mean to me, the international and FIU. And I know some many, many of my students that are, are international students, or that are re um, residents here, or that are from another country. And once we eventually stay. So, all of that is tied into that. I, and going back to that, that book that I, that I, that I, um, that I wrote this chapter on FIU, we found that many of the Hispanic communities, because if I use a Hispanic serving institution, um, help students with scholarships, the Cuban community had a series of Municipios which would, you know, from Cuba. And there were people, older people that had come, and it was like a foundation that they had, and they would give scholarships to Cuban students to come when it first started and when FIU first started in the seventies. Okay. So, so, but because the Hispanics at king were so, um, self, they really wanted that to that degree. Uh, we didn't have to do that much for them. We basically did a lot, and we do a lot more now to help students succeed than we did, even when I started here. Cause we have, we have become very sophisticated at helping students and guiding students to succeed.

YP: Yeah, that's true. Actually, I am an international student and coming from Colombia and I haven't done it without FIU. I mean, FIU pays my studies and I am very grateful with this university. Very grateful. Yeah. So do you think that what is international for you is what it means for leaders at FIU in the last decades?

NG: I do. I, I'm very happy that after all this many years from 72 to now, we never had a Hispanic faculty, uh, association. And we started one this year or they, you know, we all, and I'm happy to see that as well. Um, because we all like to help and we'd like to help Hispanic students succeed, just like we do every student. Um, but I'm glad you shared that. Your, when did you,

YP: When I came here? I came to do my master in 2019. Um, and I got a scholarship from FIU to do, to do my master and I got a scholarship to do my PhD here, and I am coming from a very low, uh, I am not coming from a rich family, so I couldn't make it without FIU because study, here is very expensive. So, and I am the first woman in my family who goes to university

¹ The Florida International University pedestrian bridge collapse occurred on March 15, 2018

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

NG: Good for you.

YP: So, and, and this means a lot for me a lot. I mean, I am the only one who is studying in the United States and doing a PhD, so, and so grateful.

NG: Your family must be very proud of that.

NG: You know, unfortunately I thought you didn't have any PhDs when I, when I got mine, but I did get scholarships because I was working full-time at FIU. So, guess ? That H that T you know, um, paid my tuition. And so, I can say that I'm a product of FIU also. Not only do I feel like I worked the bed almost like I'm the godmother, but then they also helped me to grow. So, because, because I was a full-time person here, we only had to have a one semester in residency at the university of Florida, the rest of the time the professors came here. And so, um, because of that, I was able to afford getting that degree. Yes. Just like you,

YP: That is impressive because coming here alone is a very huge challenge. You know, it's a very huge challenge

NG: especially when you're 12 years old

YP: And you were so young. Oh my gosh. Eh, okay. How do you, how do you think that women fit in this concept of international?

NG: I don't, I don't see any difference in how women and men fit into the international concept. Um, I think perhaps if we have students that are international that come from, uh, other countries where women don't have the same status as men, I like for them to be able to see that I've had students from, um, from Russian come well, I had students from Kazakhstan I have, I've had students from all over and I've had students from places where women don't really go to university very much so I, I, I, however, I don't think as far as Florida folks or us folks that they see, I don't see that there's a difference. Okay.

YP: And are there any events you attended that giving you a sense of internationalism?

NG: Um, well, uh, there have been so many symposia and there have been, um, I, I even taught a class, uh, where I brought in, um, uh, a class in, uh, in, in south America. Um, so it was an education class and, um, it wasn't in, in, uh, it was regular, uh, uh, K-12 education. And they were, uh, students in, uh, in Argentina. And because I went down to Argentina to her sister institution was Universidad de Morn and I had to take, they gave

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

me this plaque. I have to take it off my wall because everybody kept saying, I got my degree at Morn university, but, you know, they could not really, you know, pronounced Moron. And so that was lovely to bring in a live class of other students in the same major and talk about the different issues on educational things. And that was, I've done that several times. And I think, um, there are so a lot going on on that in the, in this institution, there's a lot of, uh, partner universities and a lot of projects are going on. Uh, our faculty do research with scholars in other countries, and they even go to other countries to teach and so on and so forth. As I mentioned, we have a campus in Tianjin and, um, I think this, this university really lives lives it's I it's international. Yeah,

YP: Actually. Yeah. And what is very impressive about this university is like the link that they have that this university has with south America and central America. And, and I think that is the first again, I don't know if others universities do this, but this university has a center just dedicated to study the problems in south America and the Caribbean, and they, and, FIU gives funding for research and to try to help the multiple issues that we are having in south America, that's very impressive too.

NG: Yes. And, um, we have some matter of fact, um, we had a faculty member, uh, on staff, uh, that was doing research in Cuba. And when the whole problem with the embargo stock started, uh, he couldn't go to the research there and it became, I teach higher ed law. And so, it became one of the important cases that, you know, was, you know, it was appealed because he said, well, this is, we're not, I'm not going there breaking the embargo. I it's a scholarly thing. So, it was interesting because, um, and, and, and of course the state department, if the state department says you can't go somewhere because it's unsafe, then we don't. But if I, you has had, for example, I, as I mentioned, my daughter who went here, didn't do study abroad with FIU because you had no study abroad programs when she came here. Um, you know, when she started, when FIU started having freshmen and, um, so she had to go to, she did a study abroad program with another institution locally, but, um, I, she would've loved what we have now with, with the, you know, the, not just the number of, but the quality of our programs, because I think it's really important for students to learn other languages. And I really think it's important for students to understand other cultures and the world is tiny because of how we communicate. And, and, and I, and, and we need to make those, those ties if we don't make those ties, um, we're not going to do world. Do do, you know, do well as a world community. And I think the international part of that is more making, making FIU, be a world institution used to say, world's ahead. It's making those ties and connections are important. And I hope we can continue to do that.

YP: What do you think that this is not here, but It just come in here in my mind. What do you think that are the most important historical moments, maybe two or one in the history of FIU that you think that that was very important for this institution?

Interviewee: Norma Goonen

Interviewer: Yuly Piedharita

Date: April 15, 2022

NG: I think the re the most recent one is getting, um, research classification as research One institution. That's very important, especially for people like you were getting your doctorate. Okay. Um, getting our first accreditation, uh, getting our law school, getting our medical school. That was a fight. Nobody wanted us to have a law school or medical school. Cause it's all we have enough in the south Florida. It took years and, and the presidents fought hard for that. And lobbyists fought hard for that. And we finally were able to do it and look at what our law school is doing. Our law school is number one in, um, passing of the bar has been for years. It's amazing such a young law school, a medical school. This it's just unbelievable. The progress we've made in the 50 years we've been around. It's just, I can't even think of any other institution that I could even say grew up so fast and, and so solidly.

YP: Okay. And the last one, based on your experiences with FIU, what are your hopes and dreams for the future?

NG: Well, I hope we continue to attract wonderful students like we do now. I hope we continue to attract fabulous scholars. And I hope that when my grandchildren get ready for college, they will attend here to,

YP: thank you so much. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]

Transcribed by: Yuly Piedharita and Ashley Floyd Kuntz, PhD