TRANSCRIPTION RE:

CSUMB Founding Faculty
Oral History Project 1995-98
Rina Benmayor, Project Director

Interview with Steven G. Watkins – Librarian Emeritus,
Tanimura and Antle Family Library

Interviewer, Josina Makau, Professor Emerita,
Humanities and Communication
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Makau: This is Josina Makau and I am sitting here in Monterey, California. It is the 20th of August in 2019, and I have the great honor of interviewing Steve Watkins for the oral history project at CSU Monterey Bay. And I feel especially honored because Steve was a planning Librarian hired in 1995, the first Director of Library Resources, and he was our first official Senate Chair, not to mention the longest serving member of the University RTP Committee. So you can imagine how much I'm looking forward to hearing what Steve has to say.

Watkins: Thank you, Josina.

Makau: So the first thing we’re interested in knowing from you is what motivated you to come to the University? Why did you even apply and do you have any interview stories you’d be comfortable sharing with us? That you recall. It’s been a while.

Watkins: Right, right. Well, prior to coming down to Fort Ord, I was at the University of California, Santa Cruz for 11 years. And I was very fortunate there to sort of have some major shifts in my responsibilities. It’s almost as though I held three different positions there and that was something that actually kept me stimulated and interested. I was able to do some fairly innovative work with early Internet information systems. I was able to plan from scratch an award winning Science and Engineering Library up there, as part of that team. I also essentially started the campus web presence, and ran the campus website for the first couple of years. Things then had sort of started to shift and I was coming to the end of some of those initiatives. I wasn’t actively looking for a job actually, but I happened to notice this and I think that the aspect of being involved from the ground up and starting something new... because other aspects of my
previous career had involved doing that but much more on my own and not so much as part of an institutional effort to create an entirely new university. Obviously very few people have had that opportunity in their careers. So, I read the job description which was at that point fairly broad and such since roles needed to be defined once we were on the ground. I read this Vision Statement that happened to come along with it. We've all been at institutions that have Vision Statements that sound really good and such and your day to day experience of it at many places is that it's sort of in a frame on the wall and not necessarily a living document. So, I came to my interview actually with some of those expectations that, “Well, this is really well written but do people really believe this?” That was one of the most striking parts of my interview experience, in my recollection, was that it was clear that the Vision Statement was really important to people, that people intended to base their planning, their activities and their efforts around it. So I was very impressed with that part of it.

[3:44] Some of the other things that attracted me were pretty clear. I'd worked in almost every aspect of university library operations during my career, from student through to staff member to my professional librarian career. So I felt like I understand the operational level, what it takes for various departments and roles within a library to work together and function. But being able to do that without everything already being in place and not hearing the usual refrain of “This is the way we've always done that,” embracing that kind of change and the opportunity to create things the way we thought they should be rather than in response or in opposition to the way it had always been done, that was really exciting.

I remember at some point towards the end of my interview -- I believe Ken Nishita, Chris Taylor and George Baldwin were on my search committee --, asking each of them to let me know what it was they expected of a planning librarian. I don't remember offhand what Ken said but Chris Taylor said, “I need somebody who can get down on their hands and knees and install
wiring for CD ROM networks and the like and won’t be above doing that kind of work.” Yes, I didn’t respond initially to any of them. And George talked about the need to get involved in teaching and being an effective teacher. So I think I had perfect ready responses to the first two because I had direct experience, but quite frankly my teaching experience coming into this was pretty limited. Limited mainly to teaching library tools. So that was clearly going to be one of my challenges because as it turned out three days before classes started the first semester, I was asked to teach a full section of a course on the Internet and such. So at any rate, I think that the time was right, the opportunity to do a fresh start someplace was good. And I jumped on.

[6:21] Makau: Wonderful. Well, you’ve alluded to this a little bit but could you share even more about some of your early job responsibilities? And also some of the differences in that experience from your previous experiences.

Watkins: Sure. I’d worked mainly at larger universities and so the library organizations I worked within were also larger. Therefore, you know, you tended to have more of a specialization whereas my background is actually fairly generalized in terms of being exposed to lots of different types of things. So that was a definite difference here, to be suddenly looking at a fledgling organization in its whole and looking for the missing pieces and trying to figure out initial priorities for it. So that was definitely a different experience. But, like almost everyone else, it was incredibly stimulating and actually a fair amount of fun. I also had not had extensive supervisory experience. Early on, I and the Co-Director for Library Services were the two in charge of the Library. And despite CSU regulations we were actually the formal supervisors of the initial staff that we hired and such. So that was a challenge.

Makau: I’m going to stop this for the siren. [tape stops and restarts]]

[8:05 ] Sorry, Steve, I cut you off. I didn’t want the siren making it hard for people to hear everything you have to say.
Watkins: Absolutely. One of the other nice things was of course that librarians having faculty status in the CSU put us from day one at the table in lots of conversations that were happening among the founding faculty at that stage, where we could both learn and know. . . . It’s important in librarianship to have a good understanding of what the academic programs are doing and where they’re headed because you’re trying to, among other things, build information resources that support the teaching and learning and some of the research efforts that go into that. But it also, I think, allowed us to contribute in a way where opportunities weren’t always there for a lot of librarians. Before UC Santa Cruz I worked at SUNY Albany, State University of New York for four years and there I was on the Academic Senate and we did have a similar tenure promotion process that involved a parallel process to the faculty. So this is actually a really nice opportunity to be at the table in terms of learning as well as helping to influence things.

Makau: And speaking to that, did you see any drawbacks to some of the differences between this and your experiences elsewhere?

Watkins: I’d say the lack of structure at the University as a whole in the beginning was both a real positive and became a bit of a negative. There was freedom to see a need and just run with it and such. And solve it. And solve it using your own creativity and working with your colleagues to figure it out and such. So that part of things was wonderful. When it came to some of the budgeting and such, necessary to sort of sustain ongoing operations it became quite a challenge. But that very first year, in fact in the first few weeks we were there before classes started, I remember that maybe a week and a half before the students arrived somebody noticed that nobody had budgeted for any audio visual equipment on the entire campus. It turned out that since I’d been dealing with the Library’s equipment budget, which actually was fairly generous, it turns out, we were able to carve out a big chunk of money on very short notice, order our initial complement of equipment, digital projectors which were in their infancy back then, and we
actually committed one of our first temporary staff hires to actually manage an audio visual
delivery service for the campus. So one of the great things about that time was, again, you could
see a need, it didn’t feel competitive, like we had to hold onto that money for all it was worth,
which is a situation you often get into later on. And that was great.

[11:40] But then when we would start to do planning for subsequent years and submitting budget
proposals and such, I think some of the leadership in the college we were placed in was great on
vision, wonderful on ideas and such but not so strong on the structure of the organization and
very slow to approve budgets. I know we worked with, spoke with some of the other units in the
college as well and – well, actually it wasn’t a college then. It was institutes and …

Makau: Centers.

Watkins: Centers. It was a center.

Makau: What was it called?

Watkins: It was a Center for – oh, boy – Technology and Information Resources or
something? It had the science programs. The computer and technology programs.

Makau: Oh, yeah. Who else was in there? I’m interested in hearing. So Science. Earth
Systems Science and Policy.

Watkins: The Computer … I don’t remember what they called themselves initially.
They’ve been through many name changes. But the sciences, Computer Science and
Technology Program and the Library were the three.

Makau: Oh, those were the units, okay, all together.

Watkins: Right.

Makau: And you suggested that perhaps some of the other unit directors shared your
concerns?

Watkins: Um hmm.
Makau: So you clearly were collaborating with them and trying to find feasible viable ways around this challenge?

Watkins: Yes.

Makau: Is that fair to say?

Watkins: Yeah. And one of the nice things about the organization was that we did have regular meetings of the leaders of the various areas within the Center. So that was helpful. That notion, too, everybody knew everybody on campus in those days and such. So we were encountering one another in meetings all the time or just in the hallway and such. So there was ample opportunity to sort of keep each other apprised of what was going on.

Makau: Were there any avenues beyond the immediate administration in your Center which I take to be a Dean’s position, is that a correct assumption?

Watkins: Yes, correct.

Makau: Were there any avenues that the three chairs felt would be helpful in addressing some of your concerns?

Watkins: Yes. We actually had a conversation with the then Provost about this and asking for advice on how to try to remedy the situation or figure out a way for there be a better mechanism or maybe even a more formal mechanism in terms of a budget process.

Makau: And was that helpful?

Watkins: Yes.

Makau: Oh, good. Okay, well thank you for sharing that. Please, please.

[14:32] Watkins: I would say that one other major challenge that we faced that was different from other university libraries was that the then Chancellor, Barry Munitz, the previous year, I believe, had made some rash statements before the State Legislature saying that there would be no need to build library buildings on any future CSU campuses because everything was online. And in fact
in those days we were very fortunate because collections of core journals were just beginning to be available online. EBooks didn’t exist to any extent at that point. So we actually had good discussions about that. We sort of took a pragmatic approach to it. We took the challenge on seriously in terms of building our collections of academic journals. We had very few print subscriptions over the years. We took advantage of being able to license access to some of these collections. We were very fortunate in that, later on after some years, because the CSU organized a centralized effort and even had some centralized funding to help all of the campuses move in that direction, but we started on our own for several years first.

So I remember Chancellor Munitz coming to campus during the second year and walking across the Quad with him and such and being able to say to him that we took his challenge seriously and that as he would see when we were doing a quick tour of the Library, we were not a library with online books, but we were largely a library with online journals and that was what could be accomplished at that time along those lines.

Makau: What was his response? Do you remember?

Watkins: He didn’t give a very lengthy response as I recall. [Chuckles] But I imagine that he was at least pleased that we had listened to some degree.

Makau: And in the later years were there different perspectives coming out of the Chancellor’s Office on that particular point of view, because I know you have a beautiful library today.

Watkins: Yeah, and actually we have, I think, Jim May, our original Dean to thank for the fact that we were able to get a renovated building to use as a library for the first, let’s see, thirteen or fourteen years of the campus and such, because there may not have been money in the budget otherwise and I think he really put his foot down for that. No, I think that what’s been happening is libraries at most universities have transformed themselves in some fairly
fundamental ways and they’ve become much more a Learning Commons. They embrace and
take on a lot of different roles as a neutral gathering point for freedom of expression and such on
campus. So the notion of the collections being the be-all and end-all has really hasn’t faded, they
are still incredibly important because you need access to that material to do your research and
such, but I think they’ve become more. . .

[18:03] So it’s clear from things like usage studies and such that libraries are still generally very
heavily used. I’d say perhaps except by the science faculty, all of whose journals are online
[Laughter] and they don’t feel the need to come over.

Makau: That’s funny.

Watkins: That wasn’t the case at CSUMB, though. There were quite a number throughout
the years of faculty from the sciences who were there regularly.

Makau: So you’ve alluded to the Vision Statement and its meaning to you. If I’ve
understood you correctly that you were particularly inspired by the apparent commitment beyond
just words on paper that you found when you went on your interview and even as you began your
work. Have I understood you, first of all, correctly?

Watkins: Yes, yes. That’s very true.

Makau: And as you think about the Vision Statement would you share some of what it
meant to you personally? And if it guided your personal work, how so? And anything else you
want to share about your own personal kind of sense of that statement and its meaning.

Watkins: Sure. One of the threads that really captured me was the sort of general thread
of social justice that runs through the Vision Statement. I think during my undergraduate years
during the anti-war movement in the Viet Nam War era and such, I developed a fairly strong
sense of that kind of need for social justice. So that was something that certainly appealed. There
are some elements in the Vision Statement that almost anybody can attach their favor to, you
know, the notion about the creative use of technology to support learning. That was something I’d been involved with for quite a number of years from the library perspective. And I think also one thing that struck me was the sort of egalitarian notion. You know, in the early years staff and administrators taught classes alongside faculty and such. The notion that everybody has something to learn from everyone else even though they have different roles within the institution and such, that aspect kind of came through strongly to me from the Vision Statement as well. Then lastly I’d say the student centeredness. We made so many decisions over the years by asking ourselves what would best serve the students, even when we were under some pressure to better serve the faculty’s research needs, for instance. We did not have the resources to do both well and so that’s something where I think we really succeeded and that was a driving point for much of my time there.

[21:13] Makau: So that was really much of what guided your work. How central would you say from your perspective during the early years, how central do you believe that the Vision was more writ large to the University at that time?

Watkins: Right. I’d say that it was universally very present among the faculty which is the group that I interacted with most, although I interacted with a lot of staff as well. I think some of that egalitarian notion sort of after a couple of years when everybody realized we really didn’t have personnel regulations and procedures and this and that and such, a few of the more rigid CSU practices I think started to be adopted. So I think staff in particular probably were feeling less free or able to participate in ways they might have earlier. Among the students I really don’t know. But I certainly saw that student focus driving the faculty, driving the emphasis of the tenure and promotion procedure and such, where it’s instead of publish and perish, you’d better teach well or perish, leave.
Makau: Can you speak a little more to that? Because you really were so instrumental by serving, having the longest tenure on that University-wide committee which is so critical to the tenure process. It goes beyond the department levels between the Provost and the Department and for that matter even the Dean. So really that committee provides a very important basis upon which the Provost makes his or her decision. As I recall there were five people altogether serving. They were elected, is that correct?

Watkins: Yes.

Makau: Elected by all … who?

Watkins: All of the tenured and tenure track faculty.

Makau: Okay. So it was literally just who had the most support from tenure to tenure track faculty. You were consistently voted to be on that committee every time you put yourself – you were willing to put your name forward.

Watkins: Sure.

Makau: So that situates you very well to speak to that process. Could you share some of your thoughts about that in relation to the Vision and any other aspect of the University that comes to mind?

[24:02] Watkins: Sure. As I just mentioned previously, most places you have teaching, research and service, the three main areas of scholarship. While I wasn’t on the very initial group that drafted the first policy, basing it roughly on Boyer’s four areas of scholarship I think was a much better fit for our campus.

Makau: Could you tell us those four areas?

Watkins: I can try.

Makau: We can do it together. [Chuckles]

Watkins: I can tell you the way they were named in the RTP policy.
Makau: That’s good. That sounds good.

Watkins: So it’s the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, the Scholarship of Discovery, Creation and Integration, the Scholarship of Application and the Scholarship of Service or University Service. Professional Application, excuse me.

Makau: And that’s different from the standard, if you will.

Watkins: Right. At most larger, especially Ph.D. institutions, research is the most critical factor for faculty needing to demonstrate and, you know, make substantial contributions, I think. Here, in order to be promoted or tenured and kept, you have to demonstrate quality ability to effectively teach to facilitate student learning. It’s the one drop dead category that you must achieve a rating of commendable or better even during those initial six years of consideration. So I think that that reflected very strongly on the Vision Statement. Over the years if people have joined the University, some have struggled with that. But I think one of our main roles was to make sure that – well, contributions to teaching and learning can take many different forms and there’s clearly some substantial differences in what they look like across disciplines sometimes. So part of our role was, I think, to make sure that the standards that were all agreed upon were being applied consistently and fairly across all of the colleges and the various departments. I think there were instances of grade inflation so to speak, where people who were clearly liked and such may not have been evaluated as critically as they might have been. When we would see their record of achievements next to people from a different college or whatever and could oftentimes see that there were some discrepancies in terms of how the standards were being applied. So I think there was an important equalizing function there.

[27:14] Makau: In terms of the notion of research would it be fair to say, based on your extensive experience, that faculty who actually worked in the area of studying pedagogy, of writing about pedagogy, what are some of the strengths and limits of various approaches to an
asset based, say, approach to pedagogy and so on, that that would actually be understood to be part of the Scholarship of Discovery as well? Is that a fair statement in that in some sense it’s different from the more standard approach to what counts as research?

Watkins: Yes, exactly. There were a lot of activities, that one in particular, where you are disseminating information about what you’ve learned about effective pedagogy. There were elements of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning that emphasized that. One of the only ways that you could raise above a commendable rating to an outstanding rating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning was to have influenced the teaching and learning practices of others.

Makau: Ah.

Watkins: That was the overarching criterion for that. So yes, clearly people who thought deeply about their pedagogy, tried new things, learned enough from it to share their successes and failures with the academic community at large, a lot of that sharing happened in the context of writing articles, contributing to books, presenting at conferences, etc., which are activities that would be counted under Discovery, Creation and Integration. There are also instances where having learned that, one might convene a practical hands on workshop about techniques and such, and sharing it in that context would actually potentially be considered under the Scholarship of Professional Application. So it’s interesting that I think there were drivers there that developing a thread that was based on teaching and learning could actually benefit faculty in the tenure and promotion process in multiple areas.

Makau: Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. So as you think about the early campus culture, can you speak a little bit to – and as Senate Chair you would probably, and on RTP, you probably know a great deal about workload and its relationship to people’s experiences and to the writ large experience on the campus. Can you speak to that at all?
Watkins: Sure. A little bit. I alluded earlier to the notion of the egalitarian, the notion of the structure of the campus. A similar sort of principle applied early on to the structure of the Centers and the Institutes themselves. There was an intention that faculty would work across disciplines and that a group of faculty could coalesce around some new academic thread and create an Institute in a much more fluid fashion than an academic department, a more formal department, could happen. That was, I think, good for a lot of creative thinking but in practice I think was difficult to implement. It also opened the door for the administration and the President at that time to actually say, “Oh, this would be an interesting program, I'll start that up on campus,” without involving faculty in a formal way the way curricular development normally would. So I do think that there were challenges there. There was resistance to actually putting a more formal structure in place, I’d say for the first five years or so. Partly because of this, and I don’t remember if it was Year 2 or Year 3, a Faculty Senate did start meeting. And I know that Richard Harris and I believe bobbi Bonace were a couple of the early leaders of that. But it was a group that was meeting without any real formal authority. There were some written guidelines. They’d never been accepted or adopted by the University or signed by the President. It did provide an important early foundation, though, for faculty voices and debate and input into policy to the extent it could happen, from an opportunity where all the faculty were there at the table essentially. As the campus grew, I would say that the egalitarian notion once again raised a few problems in that early on everybody literally was at the table. We would all sit around the table, the entire faculty, and talk about things. But it became time for a more representative sort of structure, a more true Academic Senate to actually represent points of view. So I think that was another thing that was driving that. I can remember a number of instances where somebody would not be at the table and not trusting their representative and show up at the 12th hour with objections. It didn’t take much more than one articulate and vocal person to derail a lot of things
that were potentially on the table back then. So I really think there was a crying need for more structure, and I think one of the main drivers, as I mentioned, was to have an organized and authority faculty voice to balance the notions of ideas of the President.

[Makau:] In your experience over the years was there any sense of change in terms of faculty, staff and your own workload. And if so, can you speak to that at all?

[Watkins:] Sure. Clearly at the beginning, since nothing was in place, what did they say? They used to call it? “Riding the bicycle while putting it together” and riding at full speed? Yeah, workload was very intense. You know, nearly every day, every week, long days. That was tiring but it was also exhilarating, totally exhilarating, because you could really see things happening and taking shape quickly. I know that in terms of the faculty in particular, work force and the level of number of faculty positions always lagged a couple of years behind the State funding. I think there was a built in problem there for a campus that was growing so quickly, where the only recourse was we have hundreds and hundreds of new students the following year, we need to offer expanding curriculum, so we would hire lecturer faculty to teach specific courses without an ongoing commitment to them. Then the enrollment would justify the need for full time positions, that you would then submit that justification the following year. Then the State might fund it the year after that. So there was a built-in workload factor for faculty in particular there that was a structural one that was very difficult to overcome. I do believe that’s one of the reasons why we ended up with a faculty composition that was so heavily on lecturer faculty and not so much on tenure track.

[The staff, I remember most of our staff, at any rate, embracing some of the same things we did early on. They got a chance to recreate an operation that they had worked in at another place and leave behind some of the things they never liked about it and try the things they would hope would work. But as I mentioned before, I do think some of the need to adopt more formal
personnel policies, I think that really hampered staff development at some point. I mean if I were in that position and would have been working that hard and that much extra and such, well, I'd probably stop putting in a lot of that extra, too. It was quite a long time before it felt like we were closer to being adequately staffed. I remember in preparing for the first WASC [Western Association of Schools and Colleges] accreditation visit, I was having to work on things related to the Senate structure. One of the things we faced were there were so many committees and senators and alternates, that to staff the entire Senate structure, every full time faculty person needed to have one and possibly two positions, roles, in some way. I remember spending a lot of time trying to think of ways to streamline the committee structure to have sitting senators also serve as committee members and chairs and such so that it would take fewer people to staff all the necessary structures. We didn’t have a lot of extraneous committees in my opinion but the workload there, where you have to cover all of the roles that you would at a large university with a fraction of the people, that was another workload factor for the faculty.

**Makau:** And you’ve described a process that appears to reveal the need for service on a substantial number of search committees. . .

**Watkins:** Oh, true.

**Makau:** . . . in addition. Is that correct? Is that a correct inference?

**Watkins:** Sure.

**Makau:** Do you have any stories you want to share about any of that dimension? The recruitment feature? The search committee and its role? Its relationship, for example, to the Vision if you think there might have been one? Anything else, perhaps some examples that you would be willing to share?

**[38:54] Watkins:** Sure. I came in the second round of the founding faculty. I think one of the most dramatic illustrations was the original thirteen, I believe, founding faculty members had to
recruit for forty other positions and had 100,000 applications. 100,000? Ten thousand. 250 applications per position. So 10,000 applications to sort through. Thirteen people, forty positions, everybody serving clearly on multiple search committees.

Makau: While teaching, I assume, a full load.

Watkins: Oh, yes. Teaching a full load, yeah, during the initial year because that’s what they were there for.

Makau: And developing curriculum that didn’t exist. Have I understood correctly?

Watkins: Absolutely.

Makau: Developing a catalog that didn’t exist.

Watkins: Yup, yup.

Makau: It sounds like quite a workload.

Watkins: Yeah. So I was glad not to have that. But you know, part of the pleasure of working on a lot of the search committees that I served on was that we attracted a lot of really good people to the campus over the years. I think to some extent that’s still very much true. So while there were oftentimes large numbers to wade through, it was always very gratifying to see that there were some highly qualified people. In many instances a diverse pool as well, although in some areas it’s difficult to recruit that. It also gave us a chance to serve. I served on one of the presidential search committees, one of the provost search committees and several other upper level administrative positions over the years. So having a chance once again to bring a faculty perspective of sorts to that process was always good. I don't know if other units had a harder time with it than the Library. The recruitment piece didn’t feel like a huge burden to us.

Makau: How important was the Vision to the recruitment? And also selection processes. At least that you recall during those years.
[41:17] Watkins: Right. I think some of the same themes I mentioned earlier would show up in our interview questions. We always asked for observations, candidates’ observations about the Vision Statement. Lots of student centered questions, in terms of that as an emphasis. The ability to deal effectively with a diverse student population which the campus always has had. It’s one of the rich aspects of being there. As things went by over time there were fewer of those opportunities for sort of the entrepreneurial notion of doing things completely new. But yes, so I do think we tried to always bring the Vision Statement into the interview process, sometimes not very successfully.

Makau: Do you remember any instances of success or lack thereof that you’d be comfortable sharing?

Watkins: Yeah. I’d say that most of the people we ended up hiring for the Library faculty gave very thoughtful and effective responses to … They demonstrated they had clearly read and thought about the Vision Statement. Clearly we were also assessing them for other skills. I do think we’ve had a very student focused group of librarians there throughout the time. So yeah, I think that has had some effect.

Makau: Thank you. You have mentioned a number of key personalities and their influence on the formation of the University. Are there any others, persons from your perspective that you’d want to talk about?

Watkins: I remember when we were in a work group to start drafting the original Constitution for the Academic Assembly and then the Bylaws for the Academic Senate that would – to whom the responsibilities would be delegated for carrying things out. There were some great people on that group and one that sticks out to me was Betty McEady. She had both deep experience, could articulate things that the rest of us would be struggling with, and in terms of crafting our words carefully she was invaluable. Because in a document like that the nuance of
wording can become very important down the road. So she was clearly important. At that point I was I think serving as Senate Parliamentarian and then became Senate Chair while negotiations were being finalized between the faculty and the administration. Diane Cordero de Noriega was the Provost at the time. So I had frequent conversations with her. She was playing intermediary between President Smith and myself negotiating things back and forth. I always really appreciated her style during that. It was non-confrontational. But she would of course be firm and direct on things. She needed to be. I think it resulted in a more realistic document. Some of the early drafts had the faculty claiming purview over things that they legally do not have any business doing. Some roles that are delegated to the President by definition. So she was definitely an important player there.

[45:36] Makau: Great. Thank you. In the early years do you recall any struggles that you witnessed or were involved in? Particularly difficult challenges in those early years that come to mind.

Watkins: I remember one of the times I was most impressed by Peter Smith as President, I think it might have been the spring of the first year. If not it might have been the fall of the second year. Things were chaotic and kind of spinning out of control. I think everybody across campus was feeling some of that. It wasn’t clear we were going to succeed at some level, almost. Maybe some of this was his background as a politician from Vermont but [Chuckles] he actually gave a very inspiring speech to the entire faculty and staff assembled group and such that I think really put people back on track in a way that without it, it could have actually been fairly disastrous. He said a lot of the positives of running quickly and doing things were very strong but some of the negatives were that not one hand knew what the other was doing and there were some conflicting efforts underway and not the best communication always across the campus. So that was a big challenge. I remember when we finally got the opportunity to design our new
Library building. And we went on tours of various recently built academic libraries with the Provost and the President. We had gotten our Library building all designed and it was almost ready to go out for bid, when Peter Smith decided that we should take a serious look at putting an administrative office suite on the top of the fourth floor of the building, ignoring any notion that the operating hours, the time, the mission of who is in the building and such would have very little in common. So I remember us making an effort to point that out to the students. In fact, the way the original design was the fourth floor would have had views through the atrium area out across the Bay. And that was a public student-centered space and this administrative suite would have blocked that entire view, essentially. So we challenged it.

[48:38] Makau: Who is "we"?

Watkins: Well, the Library but actually I would have to say the most effective challenge came from some of the student leadership. I don't think our challenge won the day. They had the architectural firm do a redesign to incorporate this. And in the ten or eleven months it took to do that the price of steel internationally went through the roof. And so when they put the new design out for bid it was millions of dollars above budget. So that forced us to cut back a number of areas. We actually eliminated the entire fourth floor, for one thing, and had to make other compromises, many of which are common in building projects at any rate, that you design your ideal and have to value-engineer certain features out of the final product. So at any rate so I would say that was a clear point of contention for us and an interesting opportunity to actually work with some of the student leadership.

Makau: When you think about . . . you left as a FERP faculty, is that correct?

Watkins: Yes.

Makau: Can you tell us anything about your decision to move on and to take that route and your experience of that and what you remember about it?
Watkins: Right. Well, by the time I fully retired in 2018 I had worked continuously in libraries for 45 years starting as a student assistant and through staff positions, etc. So I felt like I had accomplished many of the things that I had come to CSUMB to put in place and many things that I had no idea I would get to be involved in. The notion of being able to pare back to half time, and the way we’ve tended to do it was half-time spread out across the academic year rather than one semester full time and one semester off, was great. During a lot of phases of my career at CSUMB I was on multiple committees at the same time, involved in lots of things. One of the nice aspects of the Early Retirement program is that your committee assignments seem to pretty much melt away. Yet, you’re still there to work with the students, to do a core of what your responsibilities always have been. And we were fortunate in the Library to be able to hire new Assistant Librarian faculty before our actual retirement ended. So I had more than a year, just about a year of overlap with my replacement. So that notion that having the benefit of the experienced people there and being able to pass some of that along, mentor new colleagues, was I think invaluable. A lot of times somebody retires and leaves and there’s months before the next person arrives to take their position on and a lot of that institutional memory is lost. So I am a strong supporter of the FERP program for that reason. It doesn’t really cost the University and with the right planning you can actually hire almost two entry level faculty on the salary of the retiring person.

[52:36] And I planned it mainly to I guess correspond with my full retirement age basically, in terms of Social Security and such, but also because my wife was looking at retirement a couple of years after I started the FERP. The timing seemed right and financially the planning looked like it was manageable. And so it was a really nice way to taper off.

Makau: It really worked well. It worked well for the University from your perspective and it served you and your family as well.
Watkins: Yes.

Makau: You've alluded to much of this but I want to just open the floor in kind of a really open way. Anything that occurs to you that you haven't yet shared about your own accomplishments and your disappointments and whatever legacy that you might hope to leave behind?

Watkins: Sure. I do think that the notion of having been a key player in establishing a governance structure is a legacy I am very proud of. I think similarly, upholding the primacy of teaching and learning in the RTP [Retention, Tenure, and Promotion] process as the University was growing and a lot of people with serious research backgrounds joining the University, I think that was an important role. I was involved during my entire time there with my professional organization, which was an International Association of Marine Science Libraries. We would hold conferences annually, rotate them around different regions of the world. So I had the opportunity to meet lots and lots of colleagues from many different countries and visit the countries and experience the cultures. One of the last projects I did for them was developing a little device that's essentially a Wi-Fi point of presence -- it’s portable, the kind of thing you might take on vacations so that you could set up your Wi-Fi connections--, and building into that a collection of 20,000 digital fisheries publications from around the world, all open access publications that had been collected into repositories in various places. The notion here being that we have lots of members on remote Pacific Islands and in areas of Africa, areas of Eastern Europe for whom Internet access was very unreliable. Electricity was very unreliable. This little stand-alone device which costs about $50 each put an entire mini library, a digital library at the hands of anybody with a cell phone, essentially, or a laptop. So that was one of the culminating things of some of the technology work I had done throughout my career and such but looking at a need that would actually serve some heavily underserved areas of the world. That’s a legacy I also am proud of.
Makau: Wow. I’m just so grateful for you to have taken this time. Do you have any other thoughts you’d like to share before we close? Experiences, stories, anything else you’d like to share on a personal level?

Watkins: Not so much on a personal level. I feel I’ve been much less directly involved in the University over the past six years. But I do hope that some of the best of what we thought about and wrestled with and implemented will have staying power as the University continues to mature. I do think some of the ideas and notions in there are timeless. So hopefully they will endure the test of time.

Makau: Thank you so much, Steve.

Watkins: Thank you, Josina.

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