

TRANSCRIPTION RE:

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

**Interview with Seth Pollack
Professor and Director of Service Learning
Service Learning Institute**

**Interviewer, Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita
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Narrator: Seth Pollack
Interviewer: Christine Sleeter
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1 **Sleeter:** *Okay. So I'm just going to go in order of the general areas and it's basically you talking*
2 *about whatever things, you know, salient to you. So could you tell me about why you chose to come to*
3 *CSUMB and what things were like when you got here?*

4 **Pollack:** So, my founding story with CSUMB is kind of interesting because I got to know about
5 CSUMB through a project I was working on at Stanford. I was doing my Ph.D. at the School of Education
6 and I was coordinating this grant that was a FIPSE grant, Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary
7 Education, bringing together four institutions that were trying to understand what they could learn from each
8 other around a campus-wide commitment to service and community involvement and all those things. Those
9 four institutions were Stanford, Portland State University, Mills College, and CSUMB. This was '95 so
10 CSUMB was just beginning. I was sort of managing this process and we were meeting together three times
11 a year at different campuses. And Marian Penn, who was the Founding Director of the Service Learning
12 Institute, was the CSUMB representative. So it was interesting and curious and fascinating and oh, my gosh!
13 The processes of getting this thing started. I remember her reporting out on the grand opening, you know,
14 with Clinton and all the dynamics. So it was really interesting to be kind of a voyeur in the first period and
15 just watching and thinking, "Wow, how fascinating! How interesting!" I had come back to higher education
16 as sort of a late bloomer after a decade working in International Development, with the big question being,
17 "Why is higher education so disconnected from and irrelevant to and demeaning to and disrespectful to
18 communities, especially marginalized communities?" So to me, that was the most interesting thing going
19 on: what might it look like when universities really embrace community in a different way.

20 [2:36] So that was kind of curious to me as this was evolving. I will never forget we went to a meeting at
21 Portland State and we're in a taxi on the way to the airport. Marian's in the taxi and she says, "Oh, my gosh,
22 I'm so depressed." I go, "Why?" She says, "Well, you know, we're searching for the new Director of Service
23 Learning, the Faculty Director."

24 **Sleeter:** : *Oh, you didn't know?*

25 **Pollack:** No. Well, I had known. She says, "I just read all the applications last night and there's not
26 one person I could imagine doing the job." And my heart just sank. I mean I had this physical kind of regret,
27 nauseousness, like a physical reaction because I had not applied. I had not applied because they were looking
28 for a Full Professor with significant experience in Higher Education and I was still writing my dissertation.
29 So, we get to the airport and I said, "Marian, can we take a walk?"

30 **Sleeter:** *[Laughs]*

31 **Pollack:** And I remember walking, you know, through all the fast food joints in the Portland airport
32 and saying, you know, "Well, here's my story." I don't think she really knew about my background in
33 international work and development. The thing that she was frustrated around in the applications was finding
34 someone who had both an understanding of this thing called Service Learning, social responsibility,
35 whatever, in higher education and issues of diversity and social justice. Finding those together was hard. I
36 said, "You know, I think I could do this job. Could I – but it's too late." She said, "Well, I can't really
37 guarantee you anything but if you get an application in I could at least ensure that the committee sees it." So
38 I quickly went home and spent the weekend writing up an application and submitting it and I guess the rest
39 is history. Came down for an interview. Never thought I'd be really a strong candidate, again, as they were
40 looking for a senior scholar in the field. And got the job in 1997. So I came to campus in August of '97, the
41 beginning of year three.

42 **Sleeter:** *I kind of remember some of that because I was on the search committee.*

43 **Pollack:** So you had some background into some of the other candidates. I'm sure some of the
44 leading people in the field were interested in the job and applied for the job. But here's what's interesting,
45 Christine, is that – and we can get into more of this in a bit --, the way Service Learning has evolved in
46 Higher Education is very different than what we do at CSUMB. It's our intentionality around issues of not
47 just doing service to learn academic stuff but being involved in the community, to learn about service,
48 inequality, injustice, marginalization, privilege and power and how that – and having people, our students,
49 [chuckles] experience those difficult questions and learn from them as part of their academic legitimate
50 education. What we do, no one else in higher education has been able to do. So, you know, that framework,
51 which I don't think was so clear when I got here, the requirement was clear, the intention to do service across
52 the curriculum was clear, the clarity with which we could articulate how this is different, how this is about
53 learning about service and not just doing a bunch of service evolved as we were there. But it really gave us
54 quite a different terrain to grow into than other universities.

55 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. That is so exciting.*

56 **[6:36] Pollack:** Yeah, that was really, really powerful. The next big thing I remember was going around
57 and talking to everybody on campus because this was Year 3 and there had already been two years of up and
58 running-ness, right, in doing the curriculum and doing everything that CSUMB was hoping to do, which was
59 active learning everywhere, right? Project based learning. Active learning. Service learning. Experiential
60 learning. Learning by doing. And I remember going around from department to department asking not a
61 rhetorical question, a real question that I was searching for insights, “How do we understand the difference
62 between Service Learning and Internships?” We didn't really have a clear understanding. The quick answer
63 came to be, “Well, if you do it with a Non-Profit it's Service Learning. If you're doing it with a for profit
64 company, it's an internship.” As we were having these discussions with faculty, departments, department
65 chairs around the university, we all knew that that was a weak answer. [Chuckles] That there was something
66 else that was not expressed very well yet. One of the first intense couple of days meeting that we were having

67 with faculty doing Service Learning, trying to get more clarity into that question, we were struggling with
68 how to understand it. And Geri Philley, who was an instructor in . . .

69 **Sleeter:** *Oh, yeah, I remember her.*

70 **Pollack:** . . . Computer Science was teaching the Service Learning course in CST, Computer Science
71 and Technology. She also taught at the community college. She was kind of a math person more than a
72 computer person but she was really great with computers. She spent all night, she couldn't sleep, really trying
73 to come up with an image. Because we were talking about, well, that it [service learning] really transforms
74 the learning. It's not an add-on, right. It really changes what it is you're learning. She came back with this
75 diagram of a prism. How light goes into a prism and becomes a rainbow. That has become our most important
76 contribution intellectually to this work because it really captures both the experiential learning dimension of
77 this, which is different than traditional learning, which happens in internships, happens in field practica, it
78 happens in all kinds of community based research, so there's definitely a transformative approach to teaching
79 in Service Learning.

80 **[9:34] Sleeter:** *I remember that diagram. I didn't realize Geri was the one who ...*

81 **Pollack:** Yeah. And we use it. It's our logo now. We developed our faculty development, we have
82 a workbook on how to do Service Learning that builds off of that. It's really an effective tool. It came out of
83 that question of what is Service Learning and how is it really different? The prism, the idea that if we
84 deconstruct or investigate, examine, take apart this thing called "service" we're gonna not just accidentally
85 stumble into issues of inequality and injustice, we're going to explicitly begin to examine as students, as
86 scholars, as a university, issues of inequality and injustice and get some insight on them, "What does that
87 mean to me as a future professional in my field and a future human being in a community," right?

88 **Sleeter:** *Um hmm.*

89 **Pollack:** So that insight really emerged, I think, from the craziness of the early days. Like, go out
90 there and just learn by doing but fueled by an intentionality that was maybe grounded in the Vision, around

91 the explicit goals of CSUMB, around issues of diversity and being relevant to the social challenges of our
92 region and the young people who are growing up here. Right?

93 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

94 **Pollack:** So kind of as I'm framing it now, I say that Service Learning at CSUMB was really
95 informed by three streams of innovation in higher education. One is experiential, active learning. A second
96 is learning about diversity and social justice. And the third is outcomes-based education which forced us to
97 try to ask and to try to answer the question, "What do we want students to learn about inequality as a teacher,
98 as a business person, as a computer scientist?" Right? Which then forced us to develop learning outcomes
99 that give structure and rules to this whole process. So it's those three things that are really important, I think.

100 **Sleeter:** *Cool. Let's move to number two. You came in through a university that had what became*
101 *Colleges and I think not exactly a real sort of place for Service Learning.*

102 **Pollack:** Right.

103 **Sleeter:** *Could you talk some about the job you got hired into and how you experienced that within*
104 *the organization or not so clear organization [of the] University?*

105 [12:53] **Pollack:** Yeah. Really good question. So I was hired as a tenure track faculty in the Service
106 Learning Institute -- it's now an odd name because there are no longer many Institutes at CSUMB. They're
107 all Departments and Schools and Colleges. But at the time, everyone was an Institute. So Service Learning
108 was an Institute like Human Communication was an Institute, etc. So I was hired as a tenure track faculty in
109 the Service Learning Institute. The first question I had to solve was, "Where do I go through the tenure and
110 promotion process?" They didn't know. [Laughter] You know that book, that children's book, *Are You My*
111 *Mother?* It's like this -

112 **Sleeter:** *No.*

113 **Pollack:** There's a children's book. It's *Are You My Mother?* It's, I forget, maybe like a little farm
114 animal, let's just call it a duck, who is born and can't find his mom and goes around to all these different

115 animals and says, “Are you my mother? Are you my mother?” And of course none of them really want to
116 own this little ragged looking duck thing. I remember that was my kind of feeling. I would go from
117 department to department and, “Would you be my RTP support? Can I be a part of your College?” No one
118 really wanted me for a variety of reasons, not personal they all said. But the bottom line was, “Well, you
119 don’t really quite fit here and we don’t really want to give one of our important future lines to this position.
120 We’d rather sort of grow our department in other ways and those positions are too valuable.” So it was really
121 difficult if A, I wasn’t part of a College and B, no College really wanted me. I wasn’t supposed to take that
122 personally. But it really is a good metaphor for not so much confusion but just the lack of clarity with which
123 the organizational structure was trying to embrace these alternative ideas that a university was being built
124 around. How do you do alternative conceptual work in legitimate organizational terms in higher education?
125 So there were sort of two roads to go. Since no one really wanted me for their own political issues, the other
126 road seemed the one to pursue which was well, let’s take this thing called University-wide programs or this
127 hodge podge group of units that don’t belong anywhere, and let’s make a College out of them. So the path
128 we ended up taking was sort of pulling together a College under some kind of dean. I think our first Dean of
129 name was probably Joe, if I’m getting that right. But, we were organized as a College.

130 **[16:23] Sleeter:** *Who else was in that college?*

131 **Pollack:** So there would be ASAP [Academic Skills Achievement Program], which was the kind of
132 tutoring program. There was First Year Seminar in there. Advising was in there. Writing, the Writing Center
133 was in there. Susan, do you remember Susan?

134 **Sleeter:** *Susan Wyche.*

135 **Pollack:** Wyche. Exactly. And Jennifer Astone. Susan was doing the writing and Jennifer was ...
136 so in the early days that was our coalition of outliers, or units that didn’t really have an affiliation with a
137 structured College under a Dean, but were academic. Of those, Service Learning was distinctive because we
138 weren’t just a service unit serving the academic programs, but we were actually delivering curriculum which

139 is again part of the hybridity of the Service Learning Institute's dual identity, as we do serve the other
140 academic units, help them deliver their Service Learning through training, through community partnership,
141 through risk management, all the things we do to support Service Learning in the majors, in the departments,
142 which at that time were the Institutes. But then we also deliver our own Service Learning. At the time, when
143 I first came it was largely the lower division Service Learning course. That made Service Learning Institute
144 a little bit distinctive from our colleagues in this group. But I kept pushing for structure, an organizational
145 structure which would acknowledge and legitimate our role as an academic [18:59] element of the University.
146 Here's why that's important and I don't think we realized it at the time. It's because it legitimates the
147 knowledge that we were identifying as crucial to CSUMB's approach to Service Learning as a legitimate part
148 of the academy. Every other Service Learning Institute or program or center in the country is organized as a
149 support unit for the disciplines, for the departments, for the academic programs. Their job is to help those
150 other people teach.

151 **Sleeter:** *Oh, I didn't realize that.*

152 **Pollack:** Their job is to help those other people teach their knowledge in their disciplines. Well, in
153 higher education, our job is about knowledge creation and transfer, right? We're teaching, we're developing
154 knowledge, we're teaching it. Who owns the knowledge? The disciplines. The academic programs. The
155 majors. If you're a Community Engagement Center or Service Learning Center or Public Service Center,
156 your job is to help those other people teach their knowledge in the community through active learning.
157 CSUMB somehow stumbled into, with intentionality but maybe not expressly articulated intentionality,
158 [Chuckles] this idea that, "Uh-uh, that's not what we do here because for us this thing called service is a part
159 of our academic program and it's legitimate knowledge. Understanding what service is, what social
160 responsibility is, how that relates to inequality and injustice is a knowledge base that we are cultivating the
161 development of, and transferring that knowledge, just like mathematics, statistics, English, etc., etc." So we
162 have Quantitative literacy, Mathematics, we have Humanities, and we have what I have come to call Civic

163 Literacy, or we like to use the word Critical Civic Literacy. Right? So that really emerged as a result of us,
164 of me pushing us to be a College and to be seen as legitimate academics and scholars, I'm not using that word
165 pejoratively.

166 **[20:56] Sleeter:** *No, no. That makes a lot of sense. That you're filling in something in a way I hadn't really*
167 *thought about it before.*

168 **Pollack:** Yeah.

169 **Sleeter:** *How has this played out or worked out over time?*

170 **Pollack:** Well, so interestingly. At different points in time that College gets disbanded.

171 **Sleeter:** [Chuckles]

172 **Pollack:** And we become Programs again. Under an Associate Vice President for Academic
173 Whatever. Then we have to push to say, "Wait a minute. This is legitimate academic work." Then we're kind
174 of helped by the fact that as a faculty member, I need to be reporting to a Dean, right? So that's where the
175 old structure helps us a little bit. Because the old structure doesn't always help us but in this case, "Wait a
176 minute, here's a faculty person, An AVP, Associate Vice President, who is a manager, doesn't have the
177 legitimacy to support the growth and development of that faculty, so that faculty does need to be reporting
178 somehow to a dean. So at various times I got assigned to Marsha, who was the Dean of Science and a lovely
179 person and willing to sort of coddle and cajole and help grow the Service Learning program because of her
180 own commitments. So at times, when for one reason or another, budgetarily or administratively, we'd lose
181 our status as a College.[Chuckles]. So one time we hired a Dean of the College, who lasted like four months
182 as a dean and then took retreat rights in their discipline as a historian. And with the retreat went the money
183 for the position!

184 **Sleeter:** *Oh, my goodness.*

185 **Pollack:** So, “Sorry, you’re no longer a College because we can’t afford to hire another dean because
186 that money just left.” There were some earlier manifestations of dean-ly-ness before that. That was David
187 Anderson, by the way, who was delightful as a dean.

188 **Sleeter:** *I ran into him the other day. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.*

189 **Pollack:** Just open and willing to think outside the box about what this looks like and really
190 attempted to pull these diverse groups that he was supervising together in a unique way and lasted four or
191 five months. Maybe a year. Lasted maybe a year, maybe a year and a half and then he took retreat rights due
192 to some other political issues that were going on on campus at the time. So, with that our college got
193 disbanded. So for a good chunk of my I guess academic career, evolving from an Assistant Professor to
194 Associate Professor to Full Professor to whatever, it was Marsha who was serving as the Interim Dean.

195 **Sleeter:** *[Laughs]*

196 **[24:22] Pollack:** Right. So then we were called CUSP, the College of University Studies and Programs.
197 Then we got de-colleged. So we were called, you know, just. University-wide Programs. Then we pushed
198 and then last year again we were allowed to become a College again. Because it really affected everything
199 that we did. Often in Academic Senate meetings they would just be having to sort of write a mundane sentence
200 about well, all the college represent- and I would have to raise my hand and say, “And those of us in non-
201 colleges.” Because we were academic but not under a college. So it just made for awkwardness. It just
202 shows some of the awkwardness and uncertainty and lack of clarity. Is this academic or not? I really think
203 the campus didn’t expect it to be academic. I really do – in that they didn’t really know what they were
204 creating when hiring a tenure track professor to be in charge of the Service Learning Institute and all those
205 implications. I think because of my training in Organizational Sociology and understanding how the
206 organization of work affects what we understand the work to be, you know, I’ve been pushing that. Yes,
207 we’re legitimate, not only from a personal role of “please see my scholarship as worthy, dear sirs,” but really
208 from an institutional theoretical perspective saying, “You know what? This belongs in higher education and

209 we need to create the structure around it so that it is a legitimate set of questions and scholarly inquiries that
210 higher education can ask and endeavor in.

211 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. That makes a lot of sense.*

212 **Pollack:** Yeah, so that's been, that really has been quite the start-stop, structured-destructured
213 process. It's been quite interesting to think about that evolving. So now we're part of a College. We're called
214 University College. And it's Service Learning, First Year Seminar, the Writing Program, the Advising Center
215 and the Tutoring Program.

216 **Sleeter:** *Okay, the same ...*

217 **Pollack:** The same. More of less the same cast, just new name.

218 **Sleeter:** *And how many of them now are tenured or tenure track faculty in that college?*

219 **Pollack:** So, the Director of First Year Seminar is a tenured faculty. The Director of the Writing
220 Program was hired as an administrator. Not as a faculty line, and in the last year was able to have that position
221 recertified or reclassified as a [faculty] line.

222 **Sleeter:** *Oh, okay.*

223 **Pollack:** So they're now a faculty person. So the Director of the Writing Program, Director of First
224 Year Seminar, and the Director of Service Learning are tenured faculty. Then the Service Learning Institute.
225 Over the last 20 years, Pam Motoike was hired as an Assistant Professor and is now a Full Professor of
226 Service Learning. Deb Burke was hired as Assistant Professor and is now an Associate Professor of Service
227 Learning. So we have three tenured faculty in the Service Learning Department or Institute.

228 **[28:15] Sleeter:** *[Laughs] Let me switch to another area. Tell me what the Vision Statement meant to you*
229 *coming? What it means to you? How it's influenced how you think about your work?*

230 **Pollack:** So how can you say everything? I get emotional thinking about it. I get excited thinking
231 about it. I get purposeful thinking about it. You know, I went back to get a Ph.D. not to become a professor
232 but to sort of do some reflection on the work I was doing in International Development and these things I

233 couldn't understand, I didn't have language for. It was really quite lucky for me to, I think, to stumble into a
234 way of thinking about this work as an institutional theorist, as someone who thinks about structure and how
235 that affects the work we do. That was all kind of luck. I lucked into those perspectives. But what that gave
236 me is the courage and commitment to say I want to be involved with something that's trying to do this thing
237 called Higher Education differently. Right? I don't want to go to just any college or any university and become
238 any professor. That's so not interesting to me. Even when I was writing my dissertation, I still was not
239 convinced I was going to look for an academic job. I was thinking I could work for a foundation or any
240 variety of things that were involved in thinking deeply about community and university and learning and
241 adult education, adult learning and new development in a variety of contexts. I was in no way committed to
242 doing scholarly work in higher education. CSUMB and its commitment to doing higher education differently
243 through its Vision Statement convinced me to stay, or was not why I stayed in higher education, but that was
244 why I came to apply for this job, because of its commitment expressed in the Vision Statement.

245 **Sleeter:** *Okay, now the Vision Statement has a lot of stuff in it.*

246 **Pollack:** Yeah.

247 **Sleeter:** *What in it. . . ?*

248 **Pollack:** So explicitly, you know, naming the underclass, and using those words in a country that
249 doesn't like to even admit that we have classes. That we have a class structure here. Saying that we're working
250 with the underclass. That we're trying to create a university that's relevant to the underclass, to farm working
251 communities, to the use of our region, to being relevant to the social challenges of our region, to address the
252 issues of diversity and multiculturalism. To me, those were the core of a commitment to doing higher
253 education differently, which is different than saying let's make the old higher education available to more
254 people. That's not what I thought CSUMB was setting out to do. It was setting out to create a different kind
255 of higher education. Higher education that was more relevant to the realities of communities of our region,
256 that built on the knowledge of the communities of our region, that saw these communities as assets and not

257 as only deficits to problems to be solved, but really resources to be built on. To be able to really create more
258 meaningful opportunities and structures and create connections between people's lives and this thing called
259 Higher Education, the future opportunities that come from that, like employment and quality lives. So to me
260 that project to do higher education differently in a way that was building on and connecting to the knowledge
261 of people in our region, spoke to me. That's why I came here. You know, in the early days and even in the
262 [32:59] middle days and even in the late days, even now, that's still inspiring me. You know, and having
263 space to do that. Having space to really see communities as sources of knowledge.

264 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

265 **Pollack:** And then say, "Okay, how do we as a university source of knowledge connect with
266 communities as sources of knowledge?" Wow! We're not the only ones asking that question! There are
267 institutions all over the world asking those questions. Unfortunately sometimes those questions are harder to
268 prioritize in the light of the administrative priorities of our system and our State and those forces. I do think
269 those questions are still legitimate. They're still relevant, incredibly relevant, more relevant now than ever.
270 Unfortunately, those questions that are motivating me and motivating many others on our campus, are clearly
271 not what's motivating the Chancellor's Office. There's a different set of priorities now. We have a different
272 set of priorities now. I was going to try to say that they're maybe not in opposition to these priorities around
273 seeing communities as assets and building a way of learning that unites the assets of a university and assets
274 of communities in discovery and teaching and learning. That's not in opposition to what the Chancellor's
275 Office is wanting and doing but it's sure not what their processes and practices and policies are prioritizing.
276 If they were, we'd have a different kind of Graduation Initiative 2025, with different kind of metrics and
277 parameters and goals for the University. But unfortunately the push is to graduate them, just get them out as
278 soon as we can and let's make it efficient and let's get them graduated. I've never seen, Christie, in 20-
279 something years, 23 years, I've never seen a Chancellor's Office initiative that has required and forced so
280 much compliance and 'standing straight and at attention' in its implementation, as this. It's just this thing,

281 the Graduation Initiative 2025 has just occupied the hearts and souls of the California State University
282 System, including our leadership, so that there is nothing that can get any time and attention other than how
283 are you doing in achieving your graduation goals and objectives?

284 **[36:35] Sleeter:** *What's funny is that much of the impetus for CSUMB, as it started, came from Chancellor*
285 *initiatives to try to figure out how to reinvent higher education.*

286 **Pollack:** Right. So we're at a different space now. We're at a very different space and it's really
287 unfortunately.

288 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

289 **Pollack:** It's really unfortunate. So there you go. I think one of the differences is that while
290 CSUMB's creation might have been the inspiration of a chancellor, the current Chancellor's initiative is at
291 the directive of the [State] Legislature.

292 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

293 **Pollack:** The Legislature is saying to the Board of Trustees who is saying to the Chancellor's Office,
294 "We're giving you all this money. How come only 24% of your students graduate after four years? Do
295 something about that." And that's the only thing that seems to matter now. Don't get me started on that.

296 **Sleeter:** *I was going to say let's go back to the interview which focuses around the early years.*
297 *[Laughs] Yeah, and tell me more about your work during those early years. What you did on a day to day*
298 *basis.*

299 **Pollack:** Um hmm. I came in Year 3. Service Learning, the University was already up and running.
300 I think we might have had 600 or so students. What was really interesting from my perspective was, and it's
301 probably not so unusual to other people's perspectives, was that there was no road map. No university had
302 ever tried to require this thing called Service Learning twice in the curriculum and emphasize issues of
303 diversity and social justice and do it across the board. So we were trying to figure out what that really meant
304 and the structures to actually make it happen, university committees to look at syllabi, identifying learning

305 outcomes for the courses that we controlled which was the lower division. Do you remember we had these
306 things called ULR's? We had the Community Participation ULR. We had a CPULR learning community that
307 met, which was a really dynamic, active, creative space of people learning from each other about how to
308 teach Service Learning, how to teach issues of identity and diversity and how to have conversations about
309 privilege and power in Computer Science classes [for example].

310 **Sleeter:** *Okay. CPULR...?*

311 **Pollack:** Community Participation ULR [University Learning Requirement] was the lower division
312 Service Learning requirement. The upper division requirement was called . . . they weren't ULR's, they were
313 in the majors. We had these major learning requirements that were...

314 **Sleeter:** *GLO's?*

315 **[40:06] Pollack:** GLO's. Graduation Learning Outcomes. Right, right, right. So we had outcomes for the
316 Community Participation ULR and we had a learning community around that. And we had money. We had
317 money to support those.

318 **Sleeter:** *Well, a little bit about how the learning community went.*

319 **Pollack:** Yeah. We would actually have people show up [chuckles] and actually talk to each other
320 about their teaching! About what was happening in the Service Learning class, and the challenges of getting
321 students to be reflective and self-critical and think about power and not feel super defensive if you're a white
322 male, and not feel intimidated if you're a Latina. Really creating space for us as faculty to learn from each
323 other about that. There was a hunger for that because you found yourself in a class and ill prepared to really
324 be so successful. I did my Ph.D. in Education. I didn't learn how to do this. None of us learned how to do
325 this in our formal roles as becoming scholars or whatever we were being trained to do in our Ph.D.'s.

326 **Sleeter:** *Now, didn't you teach sections of lower division –*

327 **Pollack:** Yes. Yeah. So my job description had me teaching one course every semester. So rather
328 than teaching 12 units I was teaching 4 units each semester. The other 8 units were bought out to do faculty

329 development, fundraising, and provide leadership for the Service Learning program. So I would teach one
330 section of the lower division Service Learning course every semester. Then provide, you know, leadership
331 for the faculty development work, especially for the upper division courses. And do a lot of work around
332 fundraising to try to give us the resources to be able to do above and beyond, to really support the faculty
333 development, to support the community partnership development, support the student leadership in Service
334 Learning program, which was an innovative piece of our unfunded mandate that we were supporting through
335 [42:43] grants and things. I'm just reflecting on the first time I did that [lower division SL course] because
336 it was the first university course I ever taught. I finished my Ph.D., the ink was still wet when I came here. I
337 came here in August. School started the end of August. And I'm in front of 25 students, teaching. I'd never
338 taught in a university before. I was at a research university so I didn't even do TA [teaching assistant] work
339 in a classroom.. I'd done a lot of adult learning. I'd done a lot of community based facilitation and learning.
340 But I'd never taught a university class before. In that first class I taught, I wanted to do something based on
341 what my interests were in terms of community. So I organized it around I think it was called Neighborhoods
342 and Community Change Processes. So all the students were involved, whether it's Salinas or Marina or the
343 Alisal, in some kind of community organization that was doing something locally. It was a little vague. They
344 weren't all formal organizations. But I wanted students to really see, learn what I had become so inspired by,
345 which is what happens when people in community are inspired to make change happen in their world. Their
346 power. I wanted students to feel that and become a part of it. It was just way too ephemeral for freshmen or
347 sophomores. "I needed to show up on Thursday at 3 o'clock and work with the Boys and Girls Club." It was
348 too distant of a reality. So little by little I started to understand the kind of experiences students could really
349 learn from and grow through. Not to say that the goals of the course changed or the learning outcomes
350 changed. But I got a better handle of the role of the service experience in their learning, in terms of what's
351 going to be beneficial for them, what's going to be meaningful for them, what's going to be meaningful for

352 the communities, etc. I remember once we had a course on women's issues in the early days, pre-"Me, Too"
353 movement. I was doing work through a group in the community called "Breakthrough" which was all
354 about . . .

355 **Sleeter:** *Yes.*

356 **Pollack:** . . . men struggling with male socialization. It was very much a pro feminist men's
357 movement. In other words, trying to help men break out of the mold of the male model and become more
358 human and more feeling. So I'm doing that work on my own. And I remember in a meeting once I said,
359 "Well, how come we don't have a men's issues course? Men have issues, too." And my colleagues just
360 looked at me and said, "Teach it. What's your problem?"

361 **Sleeter:** *[Laughs]*

362 **[46:12] Pollack:** So I did. And it was amazing. And powerful. And important. Some really good teaching,
363 again connecting with young men in the University about the socialization process. In fact, I taught last night
364 and that was one of the topics. My class now meets from 6 to 10 on Wednesdays. I had the men in one half
365 of the room looking at the socialization of women and what they could do to transform those processes. And
366 I had women on the other side of the room looking at the socialization of men and what they could do, actions,
367 because we're getting at this place of, "Okay, enough socialization, let's look at liberation." Let's look at
368 transformation. Let's look at social structure at the individual, at the macro level as well, and what acts of
369 change, transformative acts can we do? Small ones. Big ones. Structural. Interpersonal. Just let's transform
370 all this ugliness. And it was fantastic. It was really rich to have the women thinking about male socialization.
371 We were putting it on the board, and we watched as this stuff came together, right, as the thing that women
372 needed to do and men needed to do were really speaking to each other. That really was born in the class I
373 taught fifteen years ago.

374 **Sleeter:** *Wow. Now while you were figuring out the lower division course you were also doing*
375 *professional development for the upper division.*

376 **Pollack:** Yes. That was really interesting because here's what happened. I'm curious to hear how
377 the other interviews talk about outcomes-based education, because by the time I came in year 3, . . . I was
378 hired by Armando [Arias] but my first supervisor was Joe [Larkin]. I forget Joe's title at the time. AVP
379 [Associate Vice President]? Something.

380 **Sleeter:** Oh. *Yeah. It could have been.*

381 **Pollack:** So when I came, Joe was sort of carrying the flag of outcomes-based education and it was
382 framed to me as a kind of a seamless part of the CSUMB approach. I think there's some contention over
383 whether that came in after or that got layered on or whether that was. . . . But that's not important because
384 when I was here it was, "Okay, we do outcomes-based education here and the first thing we need to do is
385 make sure that our courses and requirements have outcomes." The Community Participation ULR was part
386 of the whole ULR structure. So there was a system around that and there were ways, processes to [49:27]
387 develop outcomes and assessments and all that. At the upper division, ironically or surprisingly, the GLO's
388 [Graduation Learning Outcomes] didn't have the same structure. So the upper division Service Learning
389 requirement didn't have ANY outcomes. We were very clear about what the lower division course was to
390 teach and we were very clear about what you needed to have in order to have your course receive a Service
391 Learning designation, or the S designation. But that S designation was outcomes free. The S designation was
392 all about process. You gotta leave campus. You gotta do reflective learning. You gotta work on something
393 that is a community identified need. And you've got to somehow integrate the learning – that work into your
394 learning process. But there was no mention at all of what you are supposed to be learning. So in the upper
395 division it was very much the traditional Service Learning model of the service as pedagogy to help the
396 majors, the disciplines teach their content. So Business could go into the community, do 30 hours of service
397 work to help students become better accountants. Period, end of story. And know how to do a balance sheet
398 and a spreadsheet. And Computer Science could go into the community to figure out how to do websites
399 better. Period, end of story. And so the GLO didn't have Learning Outcomes initially. It was a push that we

400 had to make with the upper division leadership. It wasn't really deans. It was really the faculty. I think at that
401 time it was really a faculty driven process more. I remember very explicitly saying, "Okay, we have this
402 really nice model called the Prism which says that what's unique about Service Learning is that not only is it
403 experiential learning but we're really examining this prism of issues related to service which we
404 operationalize in that model as diversity, justice, compassion and social responsibility. So let's ensure that
405 those concepts are richly expressed in the syllabi of upper division Service Learning courses. Let's make sure
406 that those courses have some question which we called the meta question or the big question or the Service
407 Learning question or the social justice question, some big question about service and social responsibility
408 and inequality that made sense for that upper division course. So if you were a person in Computer Science
409 and you were teaching Service Learning, you needed to ask yourself the question, "What do I want my
410 students to be learning about service and inequality as Computer Scientists?" And not just saying, "Oh, my
411 students need to practice making websites," and using the community as a nice blackboard to practice making
412 websites.

413 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. Yeah.*

414 **[53:07] Pollack:** So the early work was really sort of open. We opened this really nice "let a thousand
415 flowers bloom" space in the garden of social responsibility and social justice, oriented from each of the
416 majors without a lot of structure to it. It was really, really rich what emerged from there. I think some fantastic
417 work emerged as, again, giving faculty the opportunity to legitimately ask the question, "What *do* computer
418 scientists need to know about inequality?" And, "How *does* that relate to the work they're going to be doing
419 in the future, the scholarship in our area?" And ultimately come up with a meta question like the digital
420 divide. "How does technology enhance or reduce inequality?" What a great question for a Computer Science
421 Service Learning class?

422 **Sleeter:** *Totally.*

423 **Pollack:** Right?

424 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

425 **Pollack:** And that question has legitimate scholarship in the area of Computer Science, right?

426 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

427 **Pollack:** It's not just us sort of touchy feely Service Learning types that are interested in it. Real
428 scholars are asking real academic questions about that and pushing our academic programs to search for those
429 connections. From your discipline, "How do you embrace issues of inequality and social responsibility?"
430 Putting that at the heart of your Service Learning programs became how we approached the development of
431 upper division Service Learning. I think it was really let a thousand flowers bloom in a loosely tended garden
432 of social responsibility. Again, we didn't say it's okay if they're just going out there and building websites
433 and they should be reflecting on the quality of their websites.

434 **Sleeter:** *How much are you writing about all of this?*

435 **Pollack:** Not enough. I've written about this over and over again. Every year or two I get an article
436 published that says the same thing. [Chuckles] You know, I remember at Stanford, taking courses from really
437 well esteemed faculty in our field, in Education. I remember, of course, in their courses you read all their
438 stuff. I remember thinking, "Isn't that the same argument that was made in the earlier...?" It seemed like they
439 were saying the same thing in lots of different venues over and over again. Well, that's what I'm [55:55]
440 doing. [Laughs] I make the same argument over and over again in different venues with different sorts of
441 spins, but the fundamental argument is: This is about knowledge, it's not only about pedagogy. And it's about
442 knowledge in the heart of the discipline. So in 2012 there was a National Task Force on Civic Learning and
443 Social Responsibility. It was a report generated by the U.S. Department of Education on Civic Learning.
444 This was sort of the, I think the height of the interest in the United States on civic learning and social
445 responsibility. It came right after the Arab Spring. There was this sense that there was this rising opportunity
446 to democratize the world. There was an opportunity to look hard at educational structures and seeing how
447 we're doing in terms of helping our students be prepared for these new democratic, diverse, participatory

448 decision making structures. Social responsibility and civic learning was really something that people were
449 looking at and saying, “Oh, my gosh, we’re doing a pretty crummy job of helping our graduates have these
450 skill sets.” So that publication made this point: Civic learning should be fundamental from K-16. It should
451 be embedded. There should be Civic Learning outcomes everywhere. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. In that
452 report, the first 12 pages make the argument of how horrible higher education is doing and how it has ignored
453 that aspect of student learning. And on page 13 it says, “But there are promising models that offer viable new
454 ways to think about this.” And the first university they mention is CSUMB. They say CSUMB is the model
455 of an alternative approach to embedding questions of civic responsibility in career preparation, in the
456 knowledge of the discipline. So in other words, we’re saying that we just don’t want to educate just any old
457 computer scientist. We want to educate civically and socially responsible computer scientists. We just don’t
458 want to educate any kind of business people. We want to educate socially responsibility and civically engaged
459 and I would say social justice oriented business people. To some extent that’s been embraced in every Service
460 Learning course across CSUMB. Now, I say to some extent, because in some academic programs that piece
461 of the knowledge base has really been embraced as core. And faculty have been hired, tenure track faculty,
462 for whom those areas are areas of interest and scholarship and for whom teaching about social responsibility
463 in their field is what they do. In fact, a beautiful article was just published by two statistics professors. . .

464 **[59:32] Sleeter:** *Wow.*

465 **Pollack:** . . . about social justice education in Statistics. Based on their Service Learning work. It’s
466 beautiful. It expresses clearly what they are trying to accomplish in the course and what students are learning
467 from this.

468 **Sleeter:** *Do you have it in PDF?*

469 POLLACK: Yeah. I can send it to you. It’s brilliant.

470 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. I’d love it. I’d love it.*

471 **Pollack:** Those are two tenure track, or I think Judith Canner might be already tenured, faculty in
472 that area. If you look at – not to name names – but the Business program. I can't remember, since Sandy
473 Hale, of a tenure track faculty who has ever taught a Business Service Learning course.

474 **Sleeter:** *But don't they have to have Service Learning?*

475 **Pollack:** They have it but no tenure track faculty are interested in it.

476 **Sleeter:** *Oh.*

477 **Pollack:** No tenure track faculty have done the curriculum development work.

478 **Sleeter:** *Oh.*

479 **Pollack:** The people who have done it are wonderful. And energetic and enthusiastic. And yet, when
480 you see how has this area of knowledge been embraced by the Department. . .

481 **Sleeter:** *And it hasn't.*

482 **Pollack:** It hasn't. It's been saying, "Oh, you get that done and then you come and do the real work."

483 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

484 **Pollack:** You become a business person. Maybe for those few people for whom this makes sense,
485 you'll be able to link your social responsibility and your business in some interesting ways. We're not against
486 that. [Chuckles] In fact, we're for that. In fact, their big question was about the "triple bottom line," which is
487 a business concept of: it's not just about the bottom line of profit, it's about the planet, so sustainability, and
488 people, issues of equity. They've even developed a quintuple bottom line. They've added ethics and equity
489 to people, planet and profit. So they've got structure, conceptual structure, to embrace this aspect of the
490 curriculum. But it's stayed kind of in the margins. Even though that Service Learning class is rich, it doesn't
491 feed into the hearts and minds of what it means. So if we were to then say, "Have our Business graduates
492 embraced not just the title, but what it means to be socially responsible business people in the world? Maybe.
493 Those are the kinds of things that we need to look at more carefully. But the seeds are there. The other thing
494 **[1:02:36]** – this is really important – is the curricular space is there. We've carved out curricular space to

495 get at these issues. I remember recently we had an Interim Provost with whom I was able to travel to get an
496 award. We'd won some national awards because it's almost like we're in another league, right? We don't
497 have a lot of competition because nobody has given as much curricular space to this work. So we spent a
498 whole weekend in Washington, D.C. and I was able to give this person a lot of background into what we do
499 in Service Learning and try to educate them about how distinctive our program is and why. One of the
500 interesting things is people think they understand what we do but they really don't. They understand that we
501 require service. And they think that's it. If you just do a bunch of hours and you feel good about it, it's done.
502 But at the end of this trip this person said, "So, I think I get what you're saying now. You're saying to me
503 that issues of justice and social responsibility are core concepts that every major needs to be addressing, even
504 in my major, Engineering. Is that right?" I said, "That's it." They said, "In that case I totally don't support
505 Service Learning because we have so much knowledge, our knowledge is expanding in Engineering so
506 rapidly, there's so much that our students need to know that I can't afford to give you three units of our
507 curriculum to learn about social responsibility and social justice. It's irrelevant. It's not core. Because our
508 students are going to be under prepared for the challenges that they are meeting in the workplace. They're
509 going to be less competitive to their colleagues at San Jose State who didn't have those two stupid Service
510 Learning courses," right? That's the argument, right? That's the tension. What we've done is carve out and
511 maintain curricular space to have our students really engage with questions of diversity and social
512 responsibility and social justice from the perspective of their majors, to the extent that their academic
513 programs have seen that as a worthy endeavor. Those programs have flourished with Service Learning. To
514 the extent that those academic programs have seen that as: okay, they've complied with the ethic but they've
515 not really embraced it and grown it. You see the difference. You see the difference in who is teaching the
516 courses and the extent to which scholars, faculty have relationships in the community to which they are doing
517 this kind of work. So we've made amazing

518 [1:05:36] progress. I just came back, Christie from a year, my second year as a Fulbright in Europe with the
519 EU [European Union]. I was looking at academic programs across Europe. You can't find a program that has
520 the curricular space to teach about social responsibility. Sure, you can find individual programs. There are
521 amazing units and interdisciplinary groups all over who are doing fantastic work. I'm not saying that those
522 aren't inspiring in doing transformative work. But to find an institution that said across the board, "Everyone,
523 we're creating this space for our students to really wrestle with issues of diversity and social responsibility
524 from the perspective of their field and major," you know, we're unique in Higher Education in that regard.
525 Still. We've held onto that despite Executive Order 1100 last year. Despite all the trends in Higher Education.
526 We still have that space. Shrinking. [Laughs]

527 **Sleeter:** *So one of our questions has to do with your legacy. And it sounds like that's essentially what*
528 *you are describing. Your main accomplishment. You think?*

529 **Pollack:** I want to be thoughtful, you know, and not speak from ego at all. Our President uses the
530 word "regional stewardship" a lot. I don't think he understands what we do in Service Learning. I think by
531 regional stewardship the idea is universities are great resources. They've got amazing, talented processes of
532 knowledge development. If we could just get those to solve problems we'd be great regional stewards. The
533 piece that's missing there is recognizing that the process of universities working with communities – of
534 Computer Science students and faculty working with communities--, is challenging. Really, it pushes the
535 University to think of knowledge in different ways. That means making three units of our upper division
536 requirements about inequality and helping our students think about their social responsibility so that we could
537 see why – to problematize our role in this thing as opposed to seeing us as the solution. You see in
538 [1:08:58] some places, some contexts around the world, people use the term "decolonizing the knowledge
539 base." You don't hear that in our context. It's not about decolonizing. There's no sense that we have any sort
540 of problem with how we understand knowledge, that we need to think of knowledge in different ways, such
541 as helping students think about systemic issues of inequality. Issues of power and privilege and oppression

542 and how that affects their work and their futures as computer scientists, as school teachers, as nurses, as
543 physician assistants, right? What we've done, the legacy that CSUMB has built, I think, is that we've
544 established legitimate academic space for every student to ask hard questions about inequality and social
545 responsibility and to question the knowledge that they are leaving the University with and asking, "Is this
546 going to help us address these problems, these challenges? What else do I need to know?"

547 **Sleeter:** *And can I pick up on something that you said earlier that I think is real fundamental?*
548 *Valuing the knowledge that the communities hold. Communities that are historically underserved, farm*
549 *worker communities that are often seen as lacking knowledge, especially compared to university knowledge.*

550 **Pollack:** Right, you know. That's the essence of the decolonizing term. I was at a conference last
551 year when I was in Europe, and the head of Higher Education in South Africa, gave a talk. Ahmed Bawa is
552 his name. He is the first person I heard to really get at this point. This is a conference around engagement,
553 public engagement in higher education. He said, "You know what? Engagement is not like adding something
554 onto the curriculum." It's not having our students as computer scientists go do a project. The best model,
555 example I have from my time in South Africa. Construction Management people, for their service work, did
556 a Habitat for Humanity construction project during the break. Okay. What did they learn about anything
557 related to inequality and social responsibility? In fact, it just reinforced all of the stereotypes because in their
558 journals which they were doing, because they were doing Service Learning, they were reflecting on how
559 come the local people just sit around and drink beer all day while we're here doing all the work.

560 **Sleeter:** *Oh. [Groaning sound.]*

561 **Pollack:** "Don't they know that we're here to help them?" and all this crap. So the real question then
562 is not adding on sort of stuff. What Bawa said is service and engagement needs to become core to the
563 knowledge base, which is our argument. Which is saying this work is about understanding what we
564 understand and what we don't understand, about working in community, about working with community,
565 about the reality of communities, about their perspective on their futures, what they know, and reinventing

566 our knowledge base so that it's relevant and real and it builds on the assets of our communities. When that
567 happens in our classes, we watch our students going from sitting back to leaning forward, engaged. Why?
568 Because now their whole life has meaning. Because they're not the problem, they're assets. Their history is
569 alive. Their mom and dad are relevant to the future, to their future work. All of this. You know all of this.
570 **[1:13:19]** But that's the difference between constructing this work as a service project and to seeing Service
571 Learning as a legitimate part of the knowledge base, right, the knowledge project. So learning – I think our
572 legacy, if we can still hold onto it going forward, and we did, we survived this last go around, is to be able to
573 even more richly articulate what it means for our graduates to be socially responsible professionals in the
574 world and what that looks like in terms of knowledge. Then, backward map that and say, "Here's where they
575 get it." And it's not just in this class, it's reinforced by all of these other aspects of their experience at the
576 University. But it has to have legitimate space in the academic project or else it's just seen as kind of fluff.

577 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. You're still at CSUMB so I wanted to ask you about leaving.*

578 **Pollack:** Haven't left. I'm still there. I've got a few more years. Um hmm. Um hmm.

579 **Sleeter:** *Seth, this has been great.*

580 **Pollack:** Thanks, Christie.

581

582 (END OF RECORDING)

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