

Tina Kuckkahn-Miller
Interviewed by Barbara Smith
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Smith: This is an interview with Tina Kuckkahn-Miller by Barbara Smith on September 8, 2020. It is for the Oral History project. It's the story of Tina Kuckkahn-Miller. Let's begin with life before Evergreen, and maybe you can describe a little bit your background and what brought you to Evergreen.

Kuckkahn-Miller: I grew up in northern Wisconsin. I'm a citizen of the Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, so I'm from northern Wisconsin. My mother is Ojibwe. My dad was German and Norwegian.

I went to school at UW-Madison and was the first person in my family to go to college. I continued on to get my law degree at the University of Wisconsin. While there, I met my first husband. I remember that he had a dilemma. He asked to meet, and he said that he had been offered his dream job in his home state of Washington, but had also been interested in pursuing a relationship. He was in a quandary and didn't know what to do. I said, "Well, you should take your dream job, and then we will visit each other and see what happens."

Eventually, I moved to Washington State after graduating Law School in 1991 and I've lived out here ever since. I have two children. My daughter Christina is going to be 36 in October, which is shocking to me. My son Richie just turned 28.

I was a single mother while I was in college from my sophomore year on. My daughter was born very prematurely. She was scheduled to come over winter break, but instead came during mid-terms as a premature baby. It was 1984 and technology was not what it is today for these premature babies. She weighed less than two and a half pounds. Her little lungs were not fully developed and she suffered a lack of oxygen, resulting in a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, which is a lifelong brain injury, so she's not going to get better. It's not degenerative, so she's not going to get worse.

I remember she had seven surgeries during the time that I was a law student and graduated from college, so that was a rough start. But my daughter's birth gave me a direction and focus that I didn't have previously. I really center her as my guiding light for getting an education despite difficult circumstances. Pretty much every decision I've ever made in terms of the houses we've built, etc., have all had her consideration for accessibility and need for care in mind.

Smith: You came to Washington eventually, ending the long-term commuting relationships. What happened then, and what did you do in Washington before you joined Evergreen?

Kuckkahn-Miller: I enjoyed being a stay-at-home mom for a little while. Our son was born within the first year of our marriage and he also threatened to come very prematurely. In fact, my daughter was born at 28 weeks and I went into labor with him at 25 weeks. He probably wouldn't have survived, so I was on medical bed rest for 96 days until he was born full-term.

I found a group called Parent-to-Parent. They are a network of families who have kids with disabilities. By the time my son was nine months old, I was ready to interact with adults again. I saw that Parent-to-Parent had a part-time job opportunity where they needed someone who was multilingual who could go out on the county health van and interact with migrant families and others and tribal nations to let them know about support services for families who have kids with disabilities.

I applied for and I got that job, and within six months, became the Executive Director. It was a very small non-profit. I think there were only two staff. We had a really nice board. I enjoyed that work very much for three years. But then, I was reading the newspaper from my tribe from back home—one of my tribes is Lac Courte Oreilles—and they publish “News from Indian Country”. In that newspaper, I saw the opportunity for a new position called the Longhouse at The Evergreen State College.

Smith: You found us!

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah, in a newspaper from Wisconsin. I had never been to Evergreen, and I didn't know anything about the Longhouse, even though I was living in Olympia at the time.

Smith: That's interesting, because there's such a connection between your whole life—your relationship to your children, getting the Parent-to-Parent job, learning some skills that I think led to the next chapter when you did come to Evergreen. So, you saw the announcement. What happened then?

Kuckkahn-Miller: I really remember very well the interview itself because I came into the space—the literal space of the Longhouse—and I just had the sense—it was just the weight of it, the idea that I knew that a lot of people had worked really hard to make that space, so it just felt like a tremendous amount of responsibility, and I wasn't sure I was up to it. I felt intimidated by the mere presence of the Longhouse and knowing how many people had worked very hard.

I also knew that I didn't have a degree in art, and this was a position to promote Indigenous arts and cultures or Native American art at the time. Terminology changes as time passes. I wondered about that, but I thought, well, I'm going to try to make the case that because I have developed programs, I've raised money for programs, I've worked with a board, that I had transferrable skills that I thought could be applied in this instance. That was the focus that I took. I remembered being asked the

question by a prominent faculty member wearing black sunglasses in the back of the room, “Are you an artist?” I remember taking a breath and saying, “Nope, but I was hoping that perhaps that sort of neutrality would make me open to supporting all kinds of different art forms and I wouldn’t be beholden to any particular art form.” I’m not sure how that answer was received, but we’ve had a great relationship ever since.

Smith: I wonder who that person was. It’s interesting how that all happened because I was there in an administrative leadership position and John McCann and I wrote the grant to the Northwest Area Foundation. We got funding from the Legislature to build the Longhouse eventually, although it seemed for the previous 25 years, it was a pipe dream. It just couldn’t happen. They actually did some studies of funding possibilities, and I still remember what’s now called Advancement saying, “No, there’s no way you can get somebody to fund this.” We believed it.

Then Colleen Ray, an MPA student, wrote a thesis about this, “Mary Hillaire’s Dream,” and it kept resurfacing and resurfacing. I think it was Joe Olander who convinced the Legislature this was not a sacred religious building or an esoteric kind of cultural center, it was a classroom basically. But they didn’t give us any money to run the place. There we were with a building with no staff, no operating money or anything.

That’s why we wrote to the Northwest Area Foundation. We pitched it around the arts and the economic development opportunity there. It was just kind of an accident that it happened that way. We could have had a completely different mission. You picked it up as described and made it an amazing enterprise.

Kuckahn-Miller: Thank you.

Smith: What was it like at first at Evergreen? When you arrived, what’s your recollections of beginning to work here in a brand-new facility?

Kuckahn-Miller: I knew that there were huge expectations about this space because it was the first of its kind on a public campus in the United States. There were a lot of expectations. There were a lot of people who felt ownership toward the space because there had been an advisory group comprised of stakeholders, and certainly, there were faculty who felt very connected, students, alumni, administrators. There were various people internally who felt connected to the space, and then you also had to balance that with the external stakeholders. Then you have the complication of having a building that called itself a longhouse on a state college campus, which set up a whole other set of issues, because longhouses not only were places where people lived communally, but they were also

spiritual centers, so you have this space that has a lot of spiritual and cultural connotation on a state public college.

A lot of it was about negotiating and I just remember feeling like walking on a tightrope a lot of times because it was a careful balance. You had to learn how to be extremely diplomatic, knowing that a lot of people felt very strongly and passionately about the Longhouse. And it had a clear mission, so there was a set of deliverables. I felt the pressure of, okay, we're in this partnership with SPIPA, the South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency. They actually were the holders of the grant, so I had different bosses. I had you as the Provost, I had Mike Peters out at Squaxin, and the building itself was also a facility, so it really has been and continues to be sort of this hybrid, where it's a building, it's a program, and then when we package it to the outside world, it looks and acts like a Native art non-profit, but we're not because we partner with the Foundation for our grant writing. Sometimes the Foundation doesn't meet the criteria for funding sources that would normally support a Native arts organization like the Longhouse, so we've always been this unusual space.

It's about negotiation, and I remember that, because there were a lot of expectations, and here I am this completely new person. Some people were upset that some of their thoughts weren't happening—promises that were made—so it was a really difficult transitional year.

I remember you saying, "What do you need?" And I jokingly said, "I need a giant pooper-scooper to help clean up some of these messes that were made." [laughter] And I remember you walking down with this great pooper-scooper with a giant red bow. I kept it for years. I probably still have it in the Archives. [laughing]

Smith: That's funny.

Kuckahn-Miller: Those first years were really challenging. I don't know how much we say on public record. The partnership with SPIPA was challenging in terms of needing to have equal partners in this work and feeling like I was really carrying the majority of the load, and at that time, didn't have staff.

Carol Minugh, who was the founding Director of our Reservation-Based Community-Determined Program, did a great thing. She took me in her vehicle and off we went to the reservation sites that she was managing so that I could get to know students and help support students. She had a wonderful volunteer in the form of Sharon Thomas from Quinault, so Sharon was my volunteer as program support. She drove from Aberdeen every day for free. She was my main social support, and that was just amazing. We actually still stay in touch to this day. She showed up at one of the Longhouse events to support us recently. We had opened some buildings and were having a big potlatch and she was just

helping with us. I love that some of those old relationships continue to be an important part of each of our lives.

Eventually, I came back to you as the Provost and said, “We really need to have some staff support.” We had grant funds for the first three years, and then you made it possible that operational support became part of the college’s budget. That’s when we brought on—she was Laura Grabhorn at the time—she’s now Laura VerMeulen—as the Assistant Director and we also were able to get a half-time program assistant. Those were the gravy years.

Smith: Those were the gravy years! We were so lucky, Evergreen in general, and all of the flourishing public-service centers that we established.

Kuckahn-Miller: Our operations were covered. We just sought funding for the great projects that we wanted to do. That’s an easy thing to do in the grant-writing world, to fund some exciting new project as opposed to operational support.

Smith: Talk a little bit about the major projects that you did in phases: the beginning, the middle and then more recently; where that came from; about some of the tensions that were there, especially the ones about balancing relationships and all that. They are still there! But you’re in a quite different situation because you have track record now, as a Native person, but not even from the region. I remember in our Reservation-Based Program, there were dilemmas about hiring local only. There was a strong feeling among a lot of the faculty we needed only to look at local tribal members. That was hard, hard to find people and hard to navigate. I think that dilemma went away eventually, but it was there for a long time.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yes, it was real. I remember asking somebody about that, saying, “Coast Salish people have put with this mixed-blood Chippewa for quite a while. Do you think they would have rather had someone from the local tribes?” At least one perspective was that if it had been a member of a local tribe, it might be seen as the Squaxin Longhouse or the Skokomish Longhouse, and that other people might not feel welcome. Perhaps they were just being kind, but they did indicate that that neutrality helped bring that vision into play. I love the vision of the Longhouse as a gathering place for people of all cultures, and I’ve always tried to stress in public spaces that that means Native and non-Native.

I remember, as we’ve done the work promoting Native arts and cultures, wondering if this was in keeping with the vision of Mary Ellen Hillaire, our founding visionary. I’d always heard about it as a home for our students, so we’ve always been a welcoming space for our students, but we had a clear mission about Native arts and cultures.

I said, “I wonder if this is in keeping with Mary Ellen Hillaire’s vision?” Pauline Hillaire said, “Let’s ask her.” I said, “Let’s ask her?” because I knew that she had passed on in 1982. That’s when I first learned about burning ceremonies in the Pacific Northwest. On the north lawn of the Longhouse, we held a burning ceremony. We were there to communicate and to find out if there’s anything that we needed to know. I called upon the Twana Seowin Society. I called upon Bruce Miller as our most noted artist/educator/spiritual leader, especially of the smokehouse people. I got a quick education about some tribes that have smokehouses and some are Shakers and some are Christians. Oftentimes, within one tribal nation, you’ll have all three or more. Native American Church is also prominent. We held the ceremony and it was affirmed that we were on track.

Now, 25 years later, I have a student—a summer undergraduate research fellow, a SURF student—who is in the Hillaire Archives right now, and he’s unearthing a lot of material that is in danger of disintegration, so we are working on a preservation grant. It talks about the importance of dance and art. She brought in all of these cultural people and infused them into the curriculum. That’s affirming that that was part of that original vision. It’s just nice to have that reflection 25 years later.

We’ve been so busy doing the work all this time that we haven’t had a chance to really reflect back on the 25 years of our work, so we’re doing that now. We’re going to create a film and we’re going to create a publication. All of these questions are really germane and they’re helping me remember things that will probably also appear in the Longhouse’s 25th Anniversary book

Getting back to that question about things unfolding in stages, those first three years funded by Northwest Area Foundation, we worked with six partner tribes. It was the five SPIPA tribes plus Port Gamble S’Klallam. I remember when I give tours of the Longhouse, it’s fun to go into the Cedar Room because there we can start talking about partnerships. My understanding is that we received those cedar shakes and some of the older posts from the Burke Museum that were part of a replica longhouse created at the World’s Fair called “Sea Monster House.” Those materials had been sitting at Fort Worden, was it?

Smith: I don’t remember that.

Kuckahn-Miller: We were able to access those, but we had leftover building materials. We had heard that Port Gamble S’Klallam was going to build a longhouse, so we invited them to come down with their big logging trucks, and they took the giant posts to build the House of Knowledge.

Smith: I didn’t know that. That’s amazing.

Kuckahn-Miller: A lot of people don’t know that, or they’ve forgotten. I think it’s important for Port Gamble to know that. It would really be great for them to hear again.

We had leftover cedar shakes, so I had heard that Bruce Miller planned to build a new traditional longhouse, and I'd heard that Nisqually wanted to build a carving shed, so I contacted them both. Bruce Miller sent his team to come collect the cedar shakes, and those are in the House of Shlanay, which is a traditional smokehouse or longhouse at Skokomish today.

Bruce and his nephew Delbert tend to add a little spice to all their stories. Bruce liked to say that the entire smokehouse was constructed out of one giant cedar tree. [laughter] Then we did give the remaining cedar shakes to the Nisqually Tribe.

I loved that spirit of hospitality and service. It's something that we enacted from the get-go. We knew that we weren't there without the tribes, and immediately began imagining, how is it that we then give back in a partnership relationship?

Smith: That all deepens the relationship over time too and connects with where we had students. We had a huge number of students in the early years that graduated from Evergreen.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah, and the amazing opportunity students had. I wasn't here when the Longhouse was built or the carving of the Thunderbird, but I am here for the restoration of the Thunderbird, which just concluded as our first summer session under Covid-19, where we actually had in-person instruction in our new carving studio where we brought Greg Colfax back, and then he taught with Alex McCarty, who is currently on the faculty. They taught five members of the Hazel Pete family. So, if you think about these pillar families coming together now to restore the Thunderbird—turn the Thunderbird from a female to a male, by the way, added a horn on top of the head and this is what's turning it into a male presence—that's also very interesting to think about transformation of the Thunderbird, which is what we titled the course.

In the early days, Greg Colfax was faculty and Andy Peterson was the student. Together, they created not only the Thunderbird, but the Welcome Figures. When it came time to refurbish the Welcome Figure at the college entrance, one of our students was Bunni Peterson-Hait was, daughter of Andy Peterson. Then you had the next generation being mentored by Greg Colfax. To see the Welcome Woman in her splendor today is amazing.

Greg said in the early years that he was really clear that the Welcome Figure at the entrance of the campus was not Mary Ellen Hillaire. A lot of people thought that, so he cleared that up, but it was about visioning toward the future and the vision toward the Longhouse—these were all in people's thoughts at that time. He wanted her to represent something new in her current iteration, so she's there to welcome everyone to campus, and he deliberately put in some of the Pacific Rim designs that

people reflect on from various Indigenous tribal peoples along the Pacific Rim, because that's how far our work has traveled.

In those early years, there were six partner tribes. We always referenced Coast Salish. We did a lot to help the public understand the difference between Coast Salish art and Alaskan Native art because Alaska Native art was dominating the market when I first moved here. People didn't know what Coast Salish art was and they weren't purchasing it. There were Coast Salish artists using the northern form-line styles because it was popular and it sold in the market.

But there were key people who were bringing back Coast Salish art and Bruce Miller is one of those people—Subiyay. And Roger Fernandes, who is also an alumnus—because Bruce did attend our Reservation-Based Program—where he ended up being the teacher most of the time. [laughing] Roger Fernandes still to this day carries his transparency projector with him when he shares how to look at Coast Salish art. We always have to tease him about that.

He would pair up with someone like Bruce Cook, who is also an alumnus, and Bruce was Haida, so they would do presentations at the Longhouse and elsewhere, about the difference between Alaskan Native art and Coast Salish. We did a lot of work to support that. Now today, it's very rewarding—we're not claiming credit for this—to have been part of the career history of people like Shaun Peterson, Andrea Wilbur-Sigo and Joe Seymour-- these people who are really well known now. They have major public art commissions—it's rewarding to see Salish art coming to the forefront in ways that just hadn't been happening for decades.

Smith: Right. It's amazing, actually, because also many of the master artists, as I understand it, were elderly when you got going, and you set up a system whereby the next generation could learn from them before they passed on.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yeah. Pete Peterson was one of the few holders of the bentwood box technique, so we hired him as one of our first artists-in-residence. Then he taught artists from other tribes. I remember Chris Richardson from Chehalis donated his bentwood box to the Head Start program and he said, "I want my people to know that this is part of our culture, too." And now there are many more bentwood box makers—Dennis Allen—so many prolific bentwood box artists now that have really moved to the forefront.

So, we were chugging along. Les Purce was Evergreen's President, and I heard from Dale Clark who is another alumnus. We have amazing alumni. If we ever get a retrospective of Native alumni, we would see just how amazing the roster is.

Dale Clark, who is Makah and Port Gamble, was working at Squaxin and he said, “Hey, I just heard that the Ford Foundation hired their first Native American program officer. You guys should know about it.” This is also the value of partnership, right? We would never have known that if Dale hadn’t called me up. We’ve always worked well with the Squaxin Island Tribe, recognizing that they held annual fundraising dinners for years, so we always say we wouldn’t have our Longhouse at all without them—David Whitener played a very prominent role in all of that.

We told Les Purce about the Ford Foundation’s announcement, who took his guitar and went off to New York City. [laughter] He got an appointment with Betsy Theobald Richards of the Cherokee Nation and the first Native program officer at Ford, and went in and sang to her. She will say to this day that what he was evidencing was the hospitality that the Longhouse stood for, and that she had a sense of us through him. That’s just amazing.

So, he opened the door. They came for a site visit, and, as you know, getting a site visit with such a major donor is an exciting opportunity. It started out with, I think, a \$100,000 grant, and we’ve now raised, I think, over \$3M from the Ford Foundation at this point in time. One of the most exciting things that they did for us was they said, “We’re going to launch a re-granting program where we’re going to give organizations money to re-grant to others.”

I remember how this happened. Again, the value of partnership. My friend Lori Pourier is the President of the First Peoples Fund. She was going to attend “Grantmakers in the Arts” annual conference. I was just the Longhouse Director running this arts program in the Northwest. She said, “Why don’t you come?” So, I came because we were both Ford Foundation grantees. She let me stay in her room. She just opened the door, literally.

We were in a meeting and Betsy Theobald Richards said, “We’re going to launch this new national program of giving grants for artists to organizations who are already giving grants.” At that moment, I said, “Well, our Artists-in-Residence program is a grantmaking program because we solicit RFPs. Artists tell us what they want to do, our board selects the applications, and then we fund these residencies, so we’re a funder, too.”

I hadn’t really thought about us in that way before, but there was the moment, so we seized the moment. We reframed the work, and then the Longhouse became a national re-grantor on behalf of the Ford Foundation, giving grants to individual Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian artists. Our team made a deliberate choice to include the Hawaiians because they often get left out of these Indigenous opportunities, and we didn’t want that to happen.

As you know, I wrote a case study about, what is the criteria for eligibility? We don't need to go into that now unless you want to probe that a little bit. We had a national re-granting opportunity through the Ford Foundation for several years that included artists and arts organizations. There are multiple strands of work of expansion happening.

Now we were a national re-grantor. In 1998, which is actually only two years after we were born as an organization, Lillian Pitt came to me and said that she just got back from New Zealand in 1995. There was this amazing gathering of Indigenous artists from throughout the Pacific Rim. There was a handful from the North American continent. She came to find out if the Longhouse would be willing to host the first one in the United States and I said, "I need to talk to my boss, the Provost, and I'll get back to you."

I remember you saying, "If you can raise the money, then you can do it," so that's what we did. That opportunity, the flexibility to just say, "Yes, you can do it if you can make it happen," really has opened an international doorway that has only expanded and has endured over time.

In 1999 Joe Feddersen and I went to the National Māori Arts Festival in Rotorua, New Zealand, to ask permission from Te Atinga (the National Māori visual arts council) to host the first US-based Gathering of Indigenous Visual Artists of the Pacific Rim. In 2001, the Longhouse hosted 77 artists from 38 tribal nations working in five different art media, and that put us on the map. At that point, we'd become part of an international network that has been so amazing. Ford allowed us to become a national leader through our grantmaking work. The international artists' gatherings allowed us to become an international organization within a key network.

We have since hosted our second gathering. In 2017, we had over 100 artists working in eight media. This time the Museum of Glass brought in a hot shop, so we had people like Dan Friday, who turns out to be a Hillaire descendant, running the hot shop.

Now, we and our artists are part of an international network, so, in 2005, I attended a gathering in Hastings, New Zealand, where I met with the head of Te Waka Toi, which is part of Creative New Zealand. That's the NEA counterpart in New Zealand. Joe Feddersen was there. We were also meeting with Maile Andrade from the University of Hawaii. We decided that these gatherings are really great, and a way to build on them would be if we had long-term residencies.

In 2006, we began hosting Māori artists from New Zealand. They came for the next three years, and then we proposed back to them, "What if we did an exchange, and what if we sent you a Native American artist every other year?" The first person we sent was Larry McNeil. That's the model today,

where we exchange artists every other year, except this is the first year we haven't done it because of Covid-19, so there's a disruption in our history.

However, as you think about the growth of the programs, we said to the Legislature in 2009 that our programs had grown to national and international service, so we needed to expand the building. We went back to Johnpaul Jones, the original architect of the Longhouse. Laura and I chaired the committee. We worked with Facilities and the Legislature and we expanded the Longhouse. What I always find amazing is that in 1995, \$2.2M built the 10,000-square-foot Longhouse, and then in 2009, \$1.7M got us a new roof and 1,800 square feet. [laughter]

That's when the footprint of the Longhouse expands. I sometimes say a corny joke, "We became the Longer-house," so the backyard became the new gallery space and our suite of offices, and a bit of an Archives space, because one thing that was not built into the original Longhouse was any kind of storage. At that point, we had too many staff and too much stuff. We had to grow, so we did grow the Longhouse.

Smith: And you had been collecting lots of material through your program, I take it, as well.

Kuckahn-Miller: Absolutely. We've made it a policy to never ask artists to give us art because there are just too many Native art auctions up and down the I-5 corridor. We just decided that, as a matter of policy, we are not going to do that. One way that we have supported our partners who host auctions is to purchase art from an artist and donate the art to the auction for sale, which we have done every year for the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center.

We were growing as a program, growing in our space, and building our relationship with the Ford Foundation. As Betsy Theobald Richardson's portfolio began to wind down, she saw the writing on the wall, and she introduced us to another program officer. Roberta Uno has a whole different set of grantees, but she's about to lead a new initiative at the Ford Foundation called Diverse Arts Spaces. How timely!

We instantly clicked with Roberta because she understands international work. Betsy understood it, too, but she was just not allowed to support international work through her portfolio because it was about American Indians. Roberta, however, had a more expansive portfolio and did work in Mexico and Egypt and all these other places, so she "got" us. She got who we were and where we were at. We worked with her, then, to build the Carving Studio, the first carving studio.

It started out that we were just going to make some renovations on the Longhouse to make it into more of a performance space. We originally submitted a \$300,000 grant request and Roberta asked

“What could you do if I gave you a half million dollars?” I said, “We could build a building.” So, we did. We built an 800-square-foot carving studio.

For the first residency in the new carving studio, we wanted to work with an established artist and do something prominent. We hired David A. Boxley and asked him to teach bentwood-box drums. Bentwood boxes had been picked up and people knew how to do that, but although the box drum was something that was from the Coast Salish region, we didn’t know anyone who was making or using them locally. But Boxley was making them and using them with his dance group, to great effect.

We knew that everyone would want to make a box drum with David Boxley. The boards to make a box drum had to be flown in from Alaska; the materials were precious and the opportunity to work with David was precious. We put out the call to artists and said, “We ask you to apply, and you have to indicate what your interest is, and tell us how you’ll share it with your community.”

Smith: That last criterion is good.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah. “You need to be part of a dance group, or you need to be part of a canoe-journey family, some way that you’re sharing this with others because this is a unique opportunity.” We had 11 people who learned how to make bentwood-box drums. When we saw what could happen when you have dedicated space for the creation of Native art by Native people, that really lit our fire to expand, because Evergreen has some amazing art studios.

The visiting artists who have come have indicated that Evergreen’s art studios are incredible resources. They can’t believe their eyes in the printmaking studio and what Evergreen has. But our challenge had always been, because we were a public-service center, we had to slide into these narrow windows when academics were not using the spaces, so we thought, we will build our own.

We built our own and started using it to support the tribal nations. For example, in 2013, the Quinault Indian Nation hosted the Canoe Journey, so we held a workshop where Alex McCarty taught people how to make miniature canoes. Beginning carvers made canoes, we painted them, and we also made paddles. We drove in campus vans over to Quinault and we gifted those items. At the end of the Canoe Journey, the host tribe will have a giant potlatch or giveaway and they will gift out to the tribal nations that have traveled to spend time with them.

We thought how we can respond to local tribal initiatives. We’re not going to just do our own thing. I think that has been successful.

Smith: And it brings Evergreen faculty directly into it as well, which has got to be empowering to them, and important in maintaining strong ties to the college, and the college learning internally from what you’re doing.

Kuckahn-Miller: Right. Actually, that carving studio is a way to get more Native faculty into the college. We offered a summer class with Joe Tougas, who just happened to sponsor visiting artist Alex McCarty. [laughing] Then we had a visiting faculty position in which we put forward Alex McCarty. When it came time, we finally got a 3D Indigenous Art faculty position, and Alex McCarty is now part of the faculty.

Smith: That's great.

Kuckahn-Miller: It's all about leverage. My two favorite words are "leverage" and "strategy."

Smith: When there's turnover in some of the faculty, that's an ongoing problem. You have like Gail Tremblay, but she's retired, so we've got to keep rebuilding. Especially after the amazing investment it's been and the record it has. Great platform to recruit people from, I think.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yes. I guess I'm kind of linear, so I'm going to come back to that exact point at the end.

Smith: This helps the timeline.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yeah. We built this beautiful carving studio. We started doing really cool things in it. We start to offer summer school, and that's partly because, in 2008, when the market crashed, the Longhouse's budget was cut by 50 percent. I'll just say everything and you can decide how to edit this.

Walter Niemiec came to me and he was going to keep me and \$40,000 in goods and services, and I wasn't going to have any staff. I said, "No. The work has become too complicated. The team has worked too hard. Part of my salary is going to go on soft money and the rest of the team, and we're going to raise money to keep the team." That's what we did, and that's what we've continued to do. Even as a Vice President, my salary is half funded by grants that I wrote. In retrospect that was a good strategy because we've got a wonderful team who deserved to continue to be employed and continue to grow.

As we looked at the Carving Studio, we thought, what is the next building? One morning, I woke up and thought we really need a home for the weavers, because the carvers get a lot of attention in the market and everything because they're the monumental sculptors and people really fall all over themselves for the carvers. That's wonderful because they do extraordinary work, but the weavers often just get left out, so, I thought, we need to build a home for the weavers.

Leveraging funds from the Ford Foundation and our next funder had just come on the scene that I'll talk about, we approached tribes, and, for the first time, we began to do an individual donor campaign, and we built the Fiber Studio. But the Fiber Studio itself is a beautiful story.

When I woke up that morning and thought about the home for weavers I wondered, what if we had a building that paid architectural tribute to these long-term Pacific Rim relationships? Not knowing if it would even be appropriate to imagine a building with significant Māori elements I contacted the elders and the leaders of the arts organizations in New Zealand and said “What would you think if the Fiber Studio was really about our cross-Pacific connections? What if it had a distinctly Māori presence?”

They thought about it, and I heard later that maybe there was some uncertainty about it, but they came back and said, “We love it.” In 2013, we held a conference to look at two pieces of our vision. One was the Indigenous Arts Campus and the other was an MFA in Indigenous Art. At that point, the government of New Zealand sent their top carver. They sent Lyonel Grant, and he became part of the work to think about what an Indigenous Arts Campus could mean at Evergreen. He’s so visionary that he looked at the topographical map of the Indigenous Arts Campus and saw the shape of a salmon, drew a salmon overlay, and then co-presented with me to the Evergreen Board of Trustees in June, 2014, the master plan for the Indigenous Arts Campus, which, in that same meeting, became part of Evergreen’s master plan.

Smith: Wow! I wish I’d been there for that. That must have been some presentation.

Kuckkahn-Miller: It was. We were given, like, five minutes and Lyonel took 20, and I was stressing over the fact that we’d gone way over time. But John Carmichael would say how enraptured he and the other Trustees were. Lyonel went in and just bowled them over with his beautiful vision. It was amazing!

The Fiber Studio was really difficult in the sense that it was being driven by an artistic vision, which was Lyonel’s vision. He rightly came in and said, “We’re not going to build a Māori building and set it on Coast Salish land. This really has to be about both cultures, but it’s not going to be a Yin and a Yang as opposites, it’s about bringing the cultures together.”

The shape of the building, the roof symbolizes the keel of a canoe as it’s traversing the Pacific. He rightly said that we needed to center the Coast Salish people so the main entrance—which faces Dogtooth Lane—would be primarily the Northwest entrance. The other entrance, which faces the east, is primarily the South Pacific—or, specifically, Māori—entrance. But if you know the art forms, you can look and see elements of each other’s cultures reflected in each of these entrances. The result, including the collaboratively woven panels on the interior, is extraordinary.

Let me think about how MACP became woven into this, because it just turned out that as the Ford Foundation was closing down its Diverse Arts Spaces Initiative, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies sent out a team on a learning journey. They started in the Pacific Northwest because that’s where

Margaret A. Cargill fell in love with Northwest Native art and Native art in general. The foundation is based in Minnesota.

They had heard about us. They did some research and were asking, “Who’s doing work in the region in Native arts and cultures?” So, they came to us, which was an amazing opportunity. We weren’t pursuing them. In fact, there is no way to pursue them. It is very closed.

As I said, they began their grantmaking learning journey in the Pacific Northwest. I first met the MACP staff at Native Americans in Philanthropy. I was standing in the buffet line with them and I asked them if they knew anything about Canoe Journey. They became really excited about it. I said, “When you come down to Evergreen, I could arrange for a little mini-Canoe Journey.” I stepped outside and I called my son-in-law and he said, “Sure,” because he’s a captain and makes canoes. That’s another place when you’re in the right place at the right time, and you can pivot and you can reframe, and you can open a doorway.

I arranged for them to have a Canoe Journey, and if you want to hear about it, it’s the funniest story of a philanthropist that I could ever tell. Despite all the challenges that happened in our “failure to launch” Canoe Journey, we successfully launched the funding journey with MACP during that time.

Smith: Doors sure open, actually, once you really have a reputation and get known and can show impact.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yes. Do you want me to tell you that story or shall we just save that for later if we’ve got time?

Smith: Let’s hear it.

Kuckahn-Miller: Here’s a piece of advice. If you’re going to take someone on a Canoe Journey at Evergreen, be sure to check the tides. [laughter] We went down to the Evergreen Beach. We had the canoe and everything. We had the funders there. The canoe itself was a dugout, a traditional dugout canoe, and it was just too heavy to carry to the water. There was this guy on a bicycle and he said, “I know where you could launch.” Everyone was flexible and said, “Great. Cool!”

We go to the next site and that’s also a failure to launch. Finally, I just said, “Okay, Boston Harbor. We can at least go down the concrete ramp. We ended up caravanning all the way to Boston Harbor, but the funny part was this: The guy who offered to show us the next space jumped in the car with the funders. They thought he was a faculty member at Evergreen. I didn’t realize he had jumped in the car. Here was some random homeless guy hanging out at Evergreen in the car with our funders. Turns out that he’s part of a group called the Rainbow Tribe in Olympia.

Smith: They call themselves the Rainbow Tribe?

Kuckkahn-Miller: They call themselves the Rainbow Tribe. They do Native-like things, and the person is telling this to the Native arts and cultures program officer, who's a very traditional Dakota woman; I can only image how that's going over.

Then we're going through town. John Smith is the skipper and my son-in-law, and his truck begins to break down as we go through Olympia. Then we're on East Bay Drive, and his truck is literally backfiring and shooting out flames out of the tailpipes. [laughter] He has to pull over, and then I'm the only one with AAA, so then I'm stuck with this backfiring truck, waiting for AAA, while his Aunt Nutt—Annette—takes the group down to Boston Harbor. We finally had a successful launch.

Afterward, we go for dinner and we're just laughing so hard; suddenly, we realized this random homeless guy was in the rental car with the funders and the backfiring of the truck, oh my gosh! We were laughing so hard that tears were running down our faces.

To commemorate the event, Bonnie Graft, who was working with us at the time, and Bonnie is a brilliant graphic artist—we made this video. It was a real risk and we probably shouldn't have done it, but we Photoshopped the MACP representatives as if they were pushing the backfiring truck and we had backfiring flames coming out of the tailpipes. [laughter] We sent that video to them and they just about died.

Smith: It was a reenactment you did, actually.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah, with Photoshop. That was our first meeting with them, and thank goodness they were good sports and flexible, because it could have been a complete disaster. But instead, we are now in our final year of our third, three-year grant with them. We submitted a feasibility study report this summer. We were asked by them to examine whether we had the interest and capability to take on new re-granting work for them, to be their primary re-granting intermediary to mainstream higher education institutions in the Upper Midwest and Southwest, the Pacific Northwest, including into British Columbia—international. We had an attorney look into, is there any reason we can't re-grant into British Columbia, and it turns out we can, although we have to do certain things. So, that's where we are today.

Smith: The previous grant from them was focused more narrowly. Is that correct?

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah. Actually, they sort of—whereas, with the Ford Foundation, we were a national re-grantor with MACP, we were only to grant to Native artists in Washington and Oregon. They were really strict and clear about that. Last year, they added Idaho and Montana.

One of the important things about that is that they pushed us out of our comfort zone. Because prior to that, a lot of times we had everyone coming to the Longhouse, and this time they said, "We

want to make sure that you are serving rural and underserved people in the plateau, so we want you to do residencies and give grants on both sides of the mountains.” Luckily, we had some initial contacts that we built on, and now we are offering residencies and grants in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Now, we take the work out to the community.

Smith: What does that mean, taking it out “to the community?” Does that mean you do the residencies on their sites instead of yours?

Kuckahn-Miller: It means we do them on their sites in addition to ours. We have a position funded by MACP, a half-time position. It’s Linley Logan’s position. He actually works with our team to set up all these residencies and then he administers them. What we learned was a lot of communities were very interested in having workshops and residencies, but they didn’t really have the infrastructure to set it up. The Longhouse organizes everything—we contract with the artists, we get the facilities, we order the supplies—and then the people come in and they just have the best time.

Smith: Right, and it’s a cohort, it’s a learning experience, too. This group of them are together, right?

Kuckahn-Miller: Absolutely, and it continues the intergenerational model. In fact, the main thing that MACP wants to support is the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. In particular, they want—their language is to preserve endangered art forms. As you know, the Longhouse has also always supported things like glass--and printmaking and performance art, and stuff like that.

As the Ford Foundation began to move away from the long-term support of our work, they gave us an opportunity. It was a tie-off grant. It was a capacity-building grant. If we could raise a third of the money to match their grant, then the second year they’d give us more money, and then we had to raise half of the money. It was a way to help their grantees diversify their funding, rather than rely on one primary source of support.

We knew how to write grants to tribes and foundations, but what we were less adept at was individual donors. The capacity-building grant was the opportunity for us to learn how to work with individual donors, so we got some training. We also learned how to do fundraisers. That’s when we first started doing our own fundraisers. We started by doing “friend-raisers” in Seattle because we figured there’s a lot of capacity in Seattle and people weren’t familiar with our work.

Initially, we hosted events to get to know folks. The first one we did was in Eighth Generation’s new store space in Pike Place Market. As an old friend, we knew Louie Gong was a rising star, and he was getting a lot of buzz and attention about having his own place in Pike Place Market. His first public event was our public event, which was a fundraiser to learn about the Longhouse. We gave away glass salmon eggs designed by Lyonel Grant to people who donated \$10,000 or more.

Smith: How did you decide who to invite? How did you get your friends list going? Did Louie help you with that as well?

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah, he did. We were looking to make more friends in the Seattle area. We did a visioning session in 2012 and we invited a major prospective donor to that, and she was part of a successful mini-canoe journey we hosted at Potlatch Park. This is another example of being part of a network and what happens. Being part of the Ford Foundation network, we got to know the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, and became friends with Beth Takekawa, who said to me, “I think you should meet my Vice Chair of the Board. I can’t guarantee that she would want to give you any money, but I think she would be interested in your work.” When I reflect back, I realize how extraordinarily generous that was—because she connected us with her vice chair, who later becomes our co-chair of the Carving Studio campaign, along with Sen. John McCoy. But that’s another part of the story.

In 2012, I invited her to be part of our visioning session. She had a great time in the canoe, but then she disappeared. We kept reaching out to her. At the time she didn’t do e-mail, so the only way you could reach out was leaving messages that seemed to go nowhere at the Burke, and we just kept inviting her to stuff.

The night of the fundraiser at Eighth Generation, she showed up, to our great surprise. She said, “You know, I’ve just completed \$100M Burke campaign and I’d love to talk to you.”

Smith: Wow, so she was just busy.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yes, and we had people like Preston Singletary there. We thought, who are some of the big-name artists who could draw some of these collectors in Seattle? We knew of a major collector, so we just asked, not for money, but we asked if we could feature one of his major art pieces at this event, and he did. Now, he is personally supporting a book about one of our most significant artists. It’s all about the relationships and finding connections with people and building genuine connections with people.

Smith: Those have thrived because of the work that’s resulted, too. It’s amazing, actually. Enduring for a long time, I have to say. Lots of fabulous ideas just evaporate because of lack of longevity. You just don’t have the learning, and it takes time to build relationships. Right?

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yes, exactly. That’s why, when we built the Fiber Arts Studio, it was the first time we engaged individual donors. That’s when I worked with you and co-wrote a letter to the faculty and got some great support from them. We built on that support with tribal nations, and then individual donors that we had begun to work with.

We built the Fiber Studio and we had 800 people attend the opening ceremony. We had all kinds of hand-made gifts for the Potlatch giveaway, and great fanfare. It's been an amazing space. We had Gail Tremblay teaching there the first academic program. Yvonne Peterson has taught in the summer program. It's been very successful.

Out of the blue—literally—I was sitting at my desk and I got a phone call from the supervising director at MACP, who said, “We have some end-of-year money. We don't usually fund capital, but what could you do if we gave you a million dollars?” [laughter] I said, “Well, of course we have some ideas and we'll get right back to you.”

That's how we built the larger Carving Studio. The first one was 800-square-feet. It was very limited, but great. The little Carving Studio was used to create all those amazing carvings for the Fiber Studio. That's where Lyonel and Alex McCarty—then Taylor Krise is this brilliant carver from Squaxin Island who has Samoan heritage in addition to his Squaxin Island, so he got taken under the wings of Lyonel Grant and Dempsey Bob and Alex McCarty. That guy got the triple whammy of ultimate carvers, and it's reflected in the work—and James DeLaCruz, Tierra McCarry and John Smith—so we had a team of people who made all those carvings in that little, tiny space, which is pretty extraordinary.

We thought, what could we do if we had a bigger space? Now, we need a 2,000-square-foot space so we can offer academic programs, so we built a space that would be able to accommodate our student-faculty ratio. It has these amazing workbenches. We know that once carvers get going, and when they do monumental sculptures, they want to work continuously, so we built a huge outdoor overhang area that was lit, so they can work till all hours, as they do.

We felt that—and this is before Evergreen had their real financial trouble at that time, this was like 2016—I asked the Provost—it was Ken Tabbutt, serving as interim—I said, “We really need to show that we've got some skin in the game here.” The college committed \$250,000 and then the MACP Foundation gave us a million dollars, but some of it was to go to the creation of art for the Fiber Studio, so it didn't all go to the Carving Studio.

Kuckkahn-Miller: I did want to mention about hiring Glenda Breiler.

Smith: Right, and you moving into a new position.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah. I've been very satisfied with the work of the Longhouse for many years. I always laugh, like when I talk to people about student advising, how my education doesn't fit my career trajectory at all, because I'm certified to speak Spanish and I have a law degree. [laughing] But I actually notice a lot of lawyers in philanthropy because we know how to write and present publicly, and we understand deadlines, and confidentiality. All these things are important.

I felt the need to grow because I'd been in the position for over 20 years, and there weren't any other positions to move into. But I had long thought that our Native America programs, as a collective, were a strength of Evergreen that nobody had really packaged up as a collective, and thought that there would be a great opportunity if we could look at the undergraduate programs, the graduate program—MPA-Tribal Governance, and the Longhouse's work—and package those up together. I thought that would be very saleable to funders.

Smith: That's what I have always thought as well. Better said than done, though.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yeah. I had written a proposal to the interim Provost, who was Ken Tabbutt, proposing an Associate Vice President to support all the Native programs. To my surprise, he came back and said, "It sounds good, but maybe not yet." So, it was initially supported, but it didn't really go anywhere.

Eventually, when Jen Drake got hired as the Provost, I don't know if I brought it up again or if Ken had mentioned it, but, anyway, there came a new opportunity to discuss this, so I went out to dinner with three members of the senior leadership team, including the President. They said, "We read your proposal. We've talked about it. We think it's a good idea, so we think it's a good thing."

At that time, MACP had begun to talk about becoming an international re-grantor to higher ed. I don't know where I got the moxie at that moment, and I said, "Thank you. I appreciate that. Some things have changed since I wrote this proposal and I actually think that I should be a full Vice President, and that the work of tribal nations, and the prospective new work with our largest private foundation, leads to the potential of having a senior leadership position, so that we can really center that kind of work at the institution."

They said they needed to take some time and they came back and said, "Yes." At that time, I was building a relationship with the NoVo Foundation. The NoVo Foundation saw the value of what we were proposing, and so the NoVo Foundation currently funds half of my position. We took the funding that used to be for the Longhouse Director position—that was my position—and put that toward the VP. The Longhouse Director position is currently covered by MACP. In this current climate, where we're being furloughed and having budget cuts, that's the safest position for the Longhouse Director, who does not have to be furloughed or have the budget cuts because it's all soft money. Those are the only exceptions.

I've always been interested in bringing forward the next generation of leadership, and I saw that first through the Māori. I saw Tina Wirihana bringing the weavers forward anytime she would come here, and I just saw it as a model. I am really happy that we hired someone from a Washington State

Tribe in Glenda Breiler, and I think she has that positive attitude that's needed to be in that leadership position. She also really loves students. She came from Edmonds Community College where she helped recruit and retain students. She just seemed like a really great fit.

She also loves to sing and she loves to dance. The Longhouse has a drum circle every third Thursday that began in Yvonne Peterson's program, so Glenda just gets in there and she sings and drums with everybody. I like to dance, but I don't usually sing in public. It's important that we bring forward people who have skills and aptitudes that we don't have, so she's a really great fit for being a welcoming presence. I really like the fact that she embodies that vision of that spirit of hospitality. She's a smart cookie. She came to us from the Washington Indian Gaming Association where she was Deputy Director, so she also has good relationships with the tribes.

Smith: Broad background. I didn't know about that. It's very nice that you worked on a successor in such a pointed way rather than just sort of moving out into your own new lane.

Kuckkahn-Miller: And she's got Laura there, too, as the veteran who's been there since 1999. Laura gets a great new opportunity as well. I don't forget about Laura at all. In the new model with MACP, Laura will become the Program Officer. She's going to be the point person and that's one of her strengths. When artists have questions about their grant applications, Laura is the go-to person, so this is going to allow her to focus on work that she really loves and support the field in a broader way.

Smith: One of the things you haven't talked about is your roles as a teacher, which you've also done. Talk a little bit about that experience—what you've taught, how it felt, what you learned.

Kuckkahn-Miller: I was surprised to find out how much I enjoyed teaching. I get to teach regularly in the MPA program. There are courses that they offer in the regular, broad-based MPA program and I've also taught in the MPA Tribal Governance concentration.

You know the thing I love to do is raise money, so probably one of my favorite classes is called "Grant-Writing Essentials," but that's the title that was handed to me. I would probably call it "Fund Development Essentials" because I really talk to them about building these relationships and stewarding relationships. I talk about much more than grant-writing. The Longhouse and the Indigenous Arts Campus is such a perfect case study. We walk through the buildings and talk about in-kind donations and all that, so that's a course I really enjoy teaching, and it's really needed at Evergreen. What I love the most is when students come back and they say, "I just pulled down a \$200,000 grant!" [laughter]

Smith: The tangible takeaways can really lead to concrete achievements.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah, because I didn't want it to be an academic exercise, so I said, "You're going to write a real grant, or it's going to be a theoretical grant, but we're going to go through all the

processes.” I do a lot of peer review for them, and, at the end, half of the class is reviewing the proposals of the other half of the class and vice versa. I want them to understand that if they’re ever on the other side of that table that there are always more requests and demands than there are resources available, so I really wanted them to have to struggle with making those tough decisions and reporting back to their peers whether they were funded or not. At the grad-student level, you can do that because they’re adults. That works really well.

The other one that I’ve taught is “Tribal Organizations” and I taught that in the Tribal Governance concentration. I’ve taught it with two different faculty. The first was Jean Dennison and the other was Eric Trevan. They both had very different approaches and I learned so much from them, and, hopefully, our students learned a lot from both of us. I always figured that I’m the theory-to-practice person because I’m going to bring in guest speakers who run organizations, different kinds of organizations, from government liaisons at tribes to CDFIs—community development financial institutions.

So, trying to bring a variety of speakers who talk from a real-life experience—Charlene Krise has been in talking about what it’s like to run a museum—and I find that students in the MPA program are often just really hungry for a cultural aspect to the work; that it’s not just about policy, it’s not just about ATNI and NCAI [National Congress of American Indians], as important as those organizations are. They also want to know what it is to be running an organization on the ground within a tribal nation. I’ve enjoyed that kind of work and have built close relationships with the individuals of the cohorts.

I think my most important memory, though, what stands out in teaching in MPA, is the year that the college closed in 2017 due to the concern about a potential safety issue. The college closed down for a couple of days. I was teaching with Jean Dennison and what I loved was that it was not a question of “are we going to meet”, but “where are we going to meet”, and “how are we going to do this?”

Because we have these relationships with tribes, I just called Charlene and I asked if it would be possible to use the space in the museum. She immediately said, “Yes.” I worked with Doreen Swetkis, who was the Director of MPA, and they provided a rental fee, because we didn’t want to just come in and ask for space, even though they would have given it to us.

I remember that the cohort of students circled up and we said, “This is not going to defeat anyone. It’s not going to derail anyone’s educational journey. No one’s going to let anyone fail, and we’re in this together.” They felt so affirmed to be in Squaxin Island’s Museum, they felt so affirmed to be in Native space, they felt safe there. That’s the defining moment, I think, in my career, just to have

that feeling with the students and to know we had tribal partners we could call upon. It had to do with these long-term relationships and mutual support.

Smith: That's a great story. I think that sort of defines one of the themes of your career, actually, how you built this. It's amazing, Tina.

Kuckahn-Miller: Thank you.

Smith: Something to be really, really proud of. You talked a bit about challenges and a lot about successes. I didn't hear much about disappointments. You seem to be able to turn challenging, potentially disappointing situations into success. That's a real skill.

Kuckahn-Miller: Then you have to add to that—I'm going on 25 years at the institution and I'm also getting really exhausted at having to do that all the time.

Smith: It takes its toll. That's why people retire. [laughter]

Kuckahn-Miller: Yeah! That's why I started looking at my succession plan. I keep wondering, what is my million-dollar idea that's going to allow me to just go live in my cabin on the Wisconsin River? [laughter]

Smith: I don't know. I think it doesn't have to be all or nothing, either, in my experience. Being completely retired in the sense of dissociating from everything that you've done didn't work for me at all. But actually having a rebalance, where there's a much smaller engagement in that stuff that matters frees you up to do lots of other things, like manage a huge garden and deal with horses. That's kind of my retirement.

Kuckahn-Miller: That makes perfect sense because I don't know how to do "nothing".

Smith: Right. In retrospect, how do you think about Evergreen's prospects and the work that you've created, and your next step?

Kuckahn-Miller: That's a tough one given our current situation, and just being aware that I'm on record, so I would be circumspect. I feel really good about the work that everyone has accomplished in the Native American and Indigenous programs at Evergreen. People have had different pieces of the work, so you've developed the largest Native cases collection in the United States. Carol Minugh started the Reservation-Based program that delivered education in a way that nobody else was doing. Mary Hillaire had a 20-year plan that Yvonne Peterson continues to use. I think there's just so much good work that was done that will continue to benefit future generations.

We've built an infrastructure in the Indigenous Arts Campus that can be used for academics and what we're calling co-curricular activities today. I think a lot of what has been built will continue to be successful. In a recent conversation with a couple of the Visual Art faculty, we see a lot of connection

there in terms of opportunities to mutually advocate for each other's work, because there continues to be institutional barriers.

What I noticed in the Covid-19 situation that we're all in is that we're all aware, on a national level, that the pandemic is disproportionately impacting people of color. I plan to bring to Senior Leadership Team a small presentation about how it's playing out at Evergreen. We shouldn't feel isolated because we believe that we stand for racial equity and social justice—that there are still things that we need to do to walk our own talk, and there are still problems and challenges that I'm having. I thought perhaps in my new position, things might be a little different, but some of the barriers are still the same.

Smith: What are some of the barriers?

Kuckahn-Miller: For example, we had a summer school class with the Thunderbird, and now we're under Covid-19 restrictions, so before our students could come to campus, they had to fill out a questionnaire, and the faculty needed to have training. But the problem was that our students were not currently enrolled students, so they were all special students coming into summer school for the first time, and they literally couldn't get into the system, so the problem was Evergreen's system.

Smith: They've got system problems like that all over the place, as far as I can see.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yeah, for sure. But how it played out in front of all of the faculty who were offering summer programs was the e-mail that said, "Tina/Laura/Amber, what are you going to do to 'get that class into compliance?' We can't keep dragging this out."

None of the other faculty or staff were called out in this way, and we had been trying really hard to get our students into the system, and it was a system problem, so it's like the salmon swimming up and hitting the dam over and over. That's just a really small example of how that feels when you're "that class dragging it out." It wasn't us at all.

Smith: People give up when they have that kind of repeated problem of the system not working for them.

Kuckahn-Miller: That's exactly right.

Smith: Some of that problem, I think—because it isn't just you, although it was just you in that case—actually, I think, is the result of massive turnover of people down in the system that run the details. We used to have, when we were a smaller, a longer-term staff and faculty. There were people that saw their job much more broadly, and they'd been there for years, so they resolved those problems in advance. They were like bridge-builders, like Dee Van Brunt and people like that. They just knew how

to fix things, and they did. But new people don't. They're just learning what the job is, so that's a big challenge.

Kuckahn-Miller: It is, and there are fewer of those people who try to get to "yes," like Tina Pearson, without whom the college would collapse, I'm afraid. Her daughter, Amber—I hired Amber because she knows how to get things done at Evergreen. Of course she does, she's Tina's daughter. [laughing]

Smith: That's what happens when you—again, Tina Pearson's great because of Lorri Moore. There's a little channel there of education that made that all work well. You're sort of in a chain like that, too, with Glenda on your staff, and Laura, with her experience. You see kind of nests of competence, of education, of sharing, that makes the whole thing work.

It seems also like there's a—I'm obsessed with this a little bit—kind of teeter-totter tension between individualism and autonomy and working as a collectivity. You see it within the working of the planning units and within and between administrative units.

Kuckahn-Miller: Yes.

Smith: Now the college is pushing more toward the collective stuff, but there's a resistance. "Stay out. That's not your lane. Mind your own business."

Kuckahn-Miller: Right.

Smith: That's a teeter-totter, and teeter-totters are best when there's balance. Times change. You can really see that when you've been there 40 years, like I have. It was even more acute, I guess, in the first eight years when I wasn't there. But you see in the generations of people at Evergreen a kind different ethos around all of that.

Kuckahn-Miller: Right, and everybody's stressed out. We have fewer staff to lift the load.

Smith: Yeah.

Kuckahn-Miller: Everyone's getting burned out. Being furloughed, and to actually have the faculty agree to a furlough, is a huge step because it felt like for so many years, it was only the staff who were bearing the brunt of the changes.

Smith: Yeah. Well, you certainly led the way in your work in creating an exceptional—when you look at the overall history of the college, the Native programs and the Longhouse story really, really stand out as amazing impacts on the whole State. When you look at where our graduates went and what they're doing now, you couldn't find a group that's had that much impact on the food chain in terms of impact on tribes, the impact on subsequent leadership. Wonderful work.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Yeah, we're so proud of our alumni. It's funny that we've only ever done one Native alumni reunion. We did it with the Longhouse's 20th Anniversary and I think we should do something like that with the 25th because they should be celebrated.

Smith: I think we should do it with the 50th Anniversary, which is coming. I've been pounding on "Where's the list of Native graduates?" We need to get it together and do some major events around it at the 50th Anniversary. We need to get our act together on some of that stuff.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Definitely.

Smith: It should be elementary in terms of relationship-building and continuity and long-term contributions to the college.

Kuckkahn-Miller: I hope that happens, and, if not, we'll do it the night before the 25th Anniversary. We just get tired of waiting!

Smith: Yeah, I know. I want it right now, too. I do think this is all going to pass and, as long as there are people like you there in sufficient numbers and in the right places, we're going to come out of this current situation stronger, having learned a lot more, and thriving.

I want to thank you for all that you've done. It's been amazing. Any last thoughts that you want to put into this oral history report?

Kuckkahn-Miller: I suppose I'll have 10 as soon as we hang up.

Kuckkahn-Miller: Okay. I think we're good for now because I covered the trajectory of the buildings themselves and how they've come along and grown that is hand-in-hand with how the programs have grown and we've covered that. We kind of covered the next generation of leadership as being trained right now to lead the Longhouse, and the great strengths that they have. The team—my team has grown to seven people and that's pretty amazing, because now we can, in addition to promoting our arts and cultures mission, do more to focus on Native students' success, and that feels good.

Smith: That's terrific. Thank you very much. I will save this now that I know how to do this. I'll send it to Ray in Advancement, who does the transcriptions. Then he sends it to a transcriber. Eventually, the transcriber sends me back the transcription. I do the first corrections, and then I give it to you to do second corrections. Then it goes to the Archives. It has taken her as long as three months to get the transcription to me, so you have to be patient, but she does a great job.

The Oral History Project is thriving, and Nancy Koppelman is writing a book about this. It's going to be a good legacy and it's going to be auditioned, I think, at the 50th Evergreen celebration in two years. I'm very glad that you're in this.

Kuckahn-Miller: I really appreciate that you thought I was going to be included and the work of the Longhouse to be included. I think you just really get us. You were there from the beginning and you're still there. You're the only one who has the history.

Smith: Yes, that's why the old ones have to speak up. From the beginning, I've thought that Evergreen was founded partly to be an inspiration to higher education in terms of innovation. Combining the liberal arts and public service, I think, is one of the threads that makes us very distinct. It's a very replicable model, but there's not much of it, actually. Important story. Okay, thank you.

Kuckahn-Miller: Thank you.