

CSUSB Black Experience Project

StoryShare Summary

Interviewee:

Kathryn Ervin

Interviewer:

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James

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Note: This is an automated transcript and may contain errors.

StoryShare Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Okay Good morning, Professor Ervin, thank you for taking the time to speak with me this morning I've started the recording for this video do I have your permission to continue recording.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Yes, Okay, thank you, so my name is Olivia Willhide-James and I'm a senior pursuing an anthropology degree at CSUSB.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: today's August and I'll be interviewing Dr Katherine Ervin from the CSU SP department of the theater arts as part of a university archives project to better document the experiences of Black faculty staff and students at California State University San Bernardino.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Okay, so.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: For the first question, could you please state your full name birthday and where you were born.

Kathryn Ervin: hi so my name is Kathryn Ervin my birthday is in June and I was born in Pennsylvania at the valley forge army hospital where my father was stationed when I was born I'm not a doctor I'm just a full Professor.

Okay.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Okay, thank you and could you briefly describe your early life experience and education and.

Kathryn Ervin: So briefly.

Kathryn Ervin: I was, I was born in Pennsylvania my family moved my father was in the service he later went to Medical School.

Kathryn Ervin: He went to temple university and then he went to Medical School at Howard, so I lived in pencil in Philadelphia, and then in Washington DC and then, when he started his practice as a physician I moved to Detroit and I spent most of my.

Kathryn Ervin: school years high school college, I went to Wayne State University, which is a college right there in the city of Detroit and then I went to Illinois State University for my master's degree, I have a terminal degree, I have a master of Fine Arts and theatre.

Kathryn Ervin: Which is the equivalent, I guess, in terms of rank have a doctorate it's an it's a professional practice degree and I'm a theater artist I'm a director, what I do is I'd make plays I also teach acting directing etc. when I graduated from.

Kathryn Ervin: Illinois I taught for a time at Bradley University, which is in Illinois that I taught at Michigan State University and then, finally, I came to Cal State University.

Kathryn Ervin: My experiences early on, were very, very, very, very shaped by the fact that I was growing up in Detroit and Detroit is a city with a huge.

Kathryn Ervin: African American population for a great part of the time that I was growing up, we had you know, one of the first Black mayors in the nation Coleman young.

Kathryn Ervin: and

Kathryn Ervin: Large Black arts movement so in the s when the so called what we now call the Black arts movement was beginning I was just hitting my stride as a high school student.

Kathryn Ervin: And I was very involved in, of course, the arts everywhere, because my parents took me to all kinds of things.

Kathryn Ervin: But then, specifically with theatre I started a company with a good friend of mine his name is Michael Dinwiddie.

Kathryn Ervin: And we started a theater company together in Detroit satori s at our I satori theater and we were a youth theatre company.

Kathryn Ervin: seeking a theater of realistic involvement performing poetry plays and dances and scripted plays and working throughout the Detroit metropolitan area, and in fact throughout Michigan we toured as far as Lansing.

Kathryn Ervin: And Ann arbor and places like that which shows that we created and wrote with a troop of young people that that were being supported, in fact, by the city, the Department of parks and REC.

Kathryn Ervin: funding available to pay for equipment and encouraged us so that was sort of the start of my.

Kathryn Ervin: that that was the real start of my theater training and then, when I went to school at Wayne that was the formalizing of my theater training, although.

Kathryn Ervin: You know I learned a ton doing theatre, on my own Michael Dinwiddie is a playwright in New York is a nationally known playwright, and other members of the company.

Kathryn Ervin: went on to dance with the dance theatre of Harlem and others several others are in administrative positions in colleges and university George swan is that.

Kathryn Ervin: he's at one of the I think he's at Wayne county Community college I'm not sure I mean so it was a it was a very influential time for all of us.

Kathryn Ervin: So I went to a state which was wonderful it's an extraordinary school in the middle of the city with a wonderful Program.

Kathryn Ervin: Had the help of a of a Black Professor Martin Molson who encouraged me to go to go well, my parents said I was going to be something anyway.

Kathryn Ervin: and Martin encouraged me to go to graduate school and to apply and helped me with crafting an audition because at that time you audition for graduate school.

Kathryn Ervin: And so I went to Ohio State and arrange my MFA there was one, I may have been the third woman in the directing Program.

Kathryn Ervin: Maybe the second directing it the director is the person who's in charge of making the play happen, so it is not a position that is at least.

Kathryn Ervin: At that time, this was in the s, when I went to graduate school, it was still fairly rare for women to be the director right that was still kind of a new idea.

Kathryn Ervin: And there were a few Black women directors at the at the level where someone would notice there were lots of Black women directors working all over the country but working in churches and schools and places that were not.

Kathryn Ervin: sort of what would have been called national recognition, then.

Kathryn Ervin: And I finished there had a wonderful experience and wonderful teachers.

Kathryn Ervin: Especially who encouraged me to be a Black artist, the head of my committee was a man named Dr. Alvin Goldfarb who is now retired.

Kathryn Ervin: Who is a Jewish historian and was there is a historian of Jewish theater and you know theater history, etc., and he encouraged me to find out about the Black theater.

Kathryn Ervin: Because he recognized that there was not a lot there, or at least not at that time, and he said, this is an area of study, this is, this is something that that should be explored and written about and you could be the person who does that so he was a major source of encouragement and.

Kathryn Ervin: helped to kind of shape that idea that you know that there are Black arts and they are important, and they are worth considering, so he played a major role, and then I.

Kathryn Ervin: taught, six, seven years at Michigan .

Kathryn Ervin: which was an amazing experience, because I could teach.

Kathryn Ervin: They I had the opportunity to create a lot of classes, so I taught courses in Black musical theatre African American theatre African.

Kathryn Ervin: everything I could think of that I was like Oh, I could teach a course in this okay I'm going to do that, based on whatever I was reading and researching and had an opportunity to produce plays.

Kathryn Ervin: From the African theater from the Black American theater and to work with numbers of talented students who were interested in those kinds of projects Black and white.

Kathryn Ervin: who came and said yeah I'm going to be a part of that show I'll work with you so and the opportunity came up at Cal .

Kathryn Ervin: I had finished my term at Michigan State University did not get tenured.

Kathryn Ervin: And then came to CSU.

Kathryn Ervin: To be here amongst the amazing people at Cal San Bernardino.

Kathryn Ervin: It was a pretty wild ride.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: wow.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Thank you for that.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Well, actually, that is a perfect segue into our next question because I want to ask you, as a Black woman in academia, did you face any discrimination, while pursuing a faculty appointment or during the tenure process.

Kathryn Ervin: Oh yeah.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Can you provide details of this that you're comfortable sharing.

Kathryn Ervin: Sure, so.

Kathryn Ervin: My journey to tenure was really interesting and really shaped by that first experience at Michigan State University, I was.

Kathryn Ervin: I already said, I was able to do all these kinds of classes and working all these ways I worked with the Africana studies department, I was kind of I was doing lots of things, but the year process.

Kathryn Ervin: And the opportunity to move forward is very different than just doing artistic work, you know what I mean, so it was not.

Kathryn Ervin: The word the terminology, we will use now is it was not transparent, it was not clear to me what I was supposed to be doing to get to years when the time came for years.

Kathryn Ervin: I did not get tenure, can you believe that, and it was because, when I look at the portfolio.

Kathryn Ervin: I've been doing some declutter and, as we all have during coven and I was looking back at those materials I'm it's very obvious to me now why they didn't tenure me because they weren't organized in a particular way.

Kathryn Ervin: But that was because I wasn't told.

Kathryn Ervin: And I think one of the huge differences in that previous situation and coming to Cal State when I got the Cal State.

Kathryn Ervin: JC Robinson, who was, I believe the provost or the Vice President for academic affairs, whatever the title was at that time sat me down and said, this is what you have to do to get tenure, and he was he was he was quite explicit.

Kathryn Ervin: He said you're going to have to jump through a lot of hoops.

Kathryn Ervin: He said and the last one is going to be flaming he's, but you will be able to jump through it, because if you jumped through the first to the third one, is not a problem and the clarity of how.

Kathryn Ervin: How he how clearly he put that to me, I mean we were joking, and it was an it was a formal informal conversation, but it was very clear to me that there was that, yes, there was going to be this.

Kathryn Ervin: You know this process that you have to go through, but that that he and others, like him, were going to be on my side, helping me get through that.

Kathryn Ervin: which I think was very different than the process at other places where it was sort of you know tenure, you will get.

Kathryn Ervin: The you know the kind of magical and mysterious something's going to happen if you do good work, but the process of how you're being evaluated, I remember, at one point.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, and I don't want to negate the wonderful experience I had at Michigan but at one point I had a classroom visitation I didn't know that I was being visited I mean the Professor just showed up to watch me teach the class and, of course, you can imagine.

Kathryn Ervin: I was a young faculty Member then I was mortified you know that somebody was going to be watching me do this and that there hadn't been a kind of preparation or any of that.

Kathryn Ervin: No, that was the old days right so going through the process here at Cal State and having sort of been a part of the change as times have changed.

Kathryn Ervin: is very different, you know that that we try very hard, or I try very hard and the people who mentored me tried very hard to say, this is why we're doing this, this is what we're doing.

Kathryn Ervin: This is what we'll be looking at this is, you know what happens at the next step of the process and so just an awareness of how different, that is, I suspect, a great deal of it has had to do with the fact that you know you're a Black woman coming into this process you're new to it and.

Kathryn Ervin: You know that sort of Oh well, you just didn't know sorry, you know kind of.

Kathryn Ervin: Micro crushing it right.

yeah.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: So could you speak to any challenges you witness that Black faculty staff or student organization organizations have faced at CSU has been.

Kathryn Ervin: Well, be where the climate has changed.

Kathryn Ervin: How long how much I know you're fine.

Kathryn Ervin: But the climate has changed a lot.

Kathryn Ervin: When I came in and the.

Kathryn Ervin: And this is all perceptual this is, you know what I thought as a as a faculty Member coming in a great deal of our focus was on women returning to the workforce, the air force base was opened.

Kathryn Ervin: San Bernardino has you know, several military bases that was a huge.

Kathryn Ervin: Part of the understructure of the university right so we were serving this population of people who are coming back to school back into the workforce, you know, had put their children at the school situation and now we're returning.

Kathryn Ervin: And over time, that that population, so there was there was no on campus housing.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, because nobody needs to live on campus they were going to go home at the end of the day, we were truly a commuter kind of campus right.

Kathryn Ervin: But then, as times changed, and more and more people started to come, of course, you know the demographic shifted students were younger and as they got younger.

Kathryn Ervin: And as the population in the greater Samara to the inland empire change more and more students of color started to come and the expectation at the beginning was well students our students.

Kathryn Ervin: So the recognition of the particular challenges that face Brown and Black students coming into university I don't think anybody was thinking about that.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: It was like you know you you're in college now you got to do the work you better bring your supplies you better show up on time, blah blah blah blah, and so there was very.

Kathryn Ervin: I don't want to say we were unconscious but, but there was a different kind of consciousness about what it meant to be a student and for.

Kathryn Ervin: For many years of the institution or at least my understanding of the beginnings of the institution, the idea was that this was going to be sort of an Ivy league school the Dartmouth, of the desert, you may have heard.

Kathryn Ervin: That term was you know, was that was the kind of institution, where we were building the university on the hill that was going to beam the beacon of understanding.

Kathryn Ervin: I know right.

Kathryn Ervin: Right.

Kathryn Ervin: But then, socially, we had this sort of shift of a wait a minute, but if we're really serving the students, as opposed to serving the idea of the Academy, the university, then all kinds of things had to change and that change hasn't.

Kathryn Ervin: always been comfortable you know, sometimes it's been very uncomfortable it's been uncomfortable I think for.

Kathryn Ervin: Black faculty, especially as you as you come into an environment, and you know what's the expectation, because once upon a time, if you were a college university professor, that means that you are a published.

Kathryn Ervin: Writing blah blah blah right, then the intellectual intelligence, he is what you're bringing and then you're teaching.

Kathryn Ervin: And I'm doing you know, like intelligent teaching right.

Kathryn Ervin: And then over time they'll started to sort of level out.

Kathryn Ervin: And as socially the university and the leadership of the university began to say wait a minute, now we are serving a population of students who are no longer.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, mothers looking to get a job, while taking care of their children, but who are people who are going to move into some kind of workforce, what is the workforce we're training them for.

Kathryn Ervin: And not you know workforce small w down but workforce like people who are going to make things and build things so we, how do we do that, and how do we balance those two things, so it took the University of while to say.

Kathryn Ervin: Not all our students are coming to the university, you know what's the first generation student.

Kathryn Ervin: right that that was not that was that that's a new term you know years ago.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, there was no there was no difference everyone comes to college from high school and you know everything you learned in high school and.

Kathryn Ervin: Therefore, you meet level and there's no thought about why wait, but all home lives are not the same, and all high schools are not the same, and you know what I mean.

Kathryn Ervin: So, as a result, there were there were all kinds of roadblocks there was there was no, you know you were absent you lower get your grade lower there's no.

Kathryn Ervin: Sorry for you right your car broke down well too bad, you should have figured out a better way to get you know, so there was no.

Kathryn Ervin: There, there was no safety net, so it was it was very difficult and there was not very much consciousness of.

Kathryn Ervin: The of the role that Community place and keeping not just Black students, but any of our students here, they have to feel connected to something so Black students were essentially coming in and saying you know.

Kathryn Ervin: How do I do this, where do I go what you should read the manual well it's in the handbook well you know go down the hall, and that was kind of the.

Kathryn Ervin: mentality right so it was very problematic for many years, you know and, and I say problematic as it and I was one of the people who may have been contributing to the problems to.

Kathryn Ervin: Trying to be a good faculty Member and maintain you know the classroom standard of excellence is they will attend, they will have you know days of instruction, they will, whatever the manual says.

Kathryn Ervin: Compared to trying to say well wait, but you know the student in front of me what am I what am I doing for them.

Kathryn Ervin: right that makes sense.

Kathryn Ervin: Yes, there's a little rambling.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: No, no you're fine you're fine.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Could you describe any positive or negative experiences that you've encountered personally as a Black faculty Member at CSUSB?

Kathryn Ervin: The names have been changed to protect the innocent now I'm just getting.

Kathryn Ervin: The negative.

Kathryn Ervin: Let me talk about the positives because I think I think Cal State has to is a remarkable institution in the way that it's sort of been able to address the changes, one of the positive one, well, a negative and a positive as a Black faculty member coming into an arts department.

Kathryn Ervin: I think there was some trepidation.

Kathryn Ervin: My colleagues were you know oh she's going to want to do all of the Black plays because that's certainly what my resume said how is she going to get along here in an institution, where you know we have to, we have to serve all these people, we have to do a little bit of everything.

Kathryn Ervin: However, they were perfectly willing to the positive was their willingness to work with me so they said Okay, you know let's come up with something, and we did stuff I drew on my experiences in satori building plays out of poetry, I did that for several years and then my first.

Kathryn Ervin: main stage show teach on it as brothers is from the Black theatre cannon but it's a Caribbean play so it invited.

Kathryn Ervin: The Caribbean is full of all kinds of people, so it invited a multicultural.

Kathryn Ervin: cast, which is one of the big things we worry about in theater and so you know, then the department, was able to say oh OK, we got this we're yes we're going to be able to we get it we get it we get it right so.

Kathryn Ervin: So over time it's been we have been very effective in casting Black students and we have been very ineffective, you know we've had those years, when we were like.

Kathryn Ervin: We can't do Black play we don't have enough people you know we can cast a Black actor and a main stream European play, we can do those kinds of things, but always trying to serve the students so there's been that part of it.

Kathryn Ervin: Other negative experiences hearing some of the dreadful ways in which students have been treated in other classes.

Kathryn Ervin: You know that that the Professor would not back down from no you didn't turn it on time therefore year grade boom.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: You know and.

Kathryn Ervin: And sometimes trying to be a part of those negotiations, trying to reach out and say you know.

Kathryn Ervin: But there are some you know that tension I started with between you know what's the Academy what's the intellectual piece of this and what's the serving the students piece of this and then, of course, you know, there have been those few students that just you know they quit I doing it.

Kathryn Ervin: yeah and you know, and those are always heartbreaking kind of you know, know what can we.

Kathryn Ervin: One of the most positive, I had a.

Kathryn Ervin: I had a student of color.

Kathryn Ervin: who had a very difficult time at home and school was the one place, he could come and fit in.

Kathryn Ervin: And he you know and be himself and hang out.

Kathryn Ervin: He had a very difficult time getting through school, and in fact I don't think he finished, however, he left the institution and went on to a fabulous career.

Kathryn Ervin: professionally.

Kathryn Ervin: yeah I mean so there's those kind of you know who look what a difference we made just because the university.

Kathryn Ervin: The University offered the best of the university also offers the worst of the university when it will let you turn in your paper on time and no you're not going to get their financial aid and you didn't check the box, so therefore right.

Kathryn Ervin: Sorry yeah so a lot of that kind of um.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: yeah well what are some positive steps that CSUSB has taken in support of the campuses why community.

Kathryn Ervin: Well, I think.

Kathryn Ervin: I think one of the most, the most important recent things, has been the development of the affinity centers or the cultural centers the Pan African studies Center in the Black dorms that the Black students scholars I'm sorry.

Kathryn Ervin: And those recognitions not only have the importance to the Black community, but to all.

Kathryn Ervin: communities, the indigenous Center the Asian Pacific Center you know this kind of idea that oh wait your identity at the university.

Kathryn Ervin: doesn't change your identity is your identity that's who you are, and that is a that is a positive thing and sometimes an impactful thing right that whatever you brought from home is what you have.

Kathryn Ervin: For a long time, I think the Academy was like no we don't want the stuff you brought her mom.

Kathryn Ervin: What do you hear right.

Kathryn Ervin: The University, is trying to say no way that stuff you run along tell me some more about that stuff right.

Kathryn Ervin: yeah and it's starting to be a part of the cultural consideration in classes and also the cultural consideration in terms of human beings Now let me flip the script for a minute, because the other thing that was really positive for me as a.

Kathryn Ervin: younger Black faculty Member was the Community and the Community on campus the Black faculty and staff association, for example, which I think we're going to get to in a minute, was a very important.

Kathryn Ervin: place where people would say no, no, no, no, no, you don't really need to do that, you need to do this, you know if.

Kathryn Ervin: The signals from the upper administration, the dean's office, the College etc. we're not always clear here was a group of people who are going to tell me the real deal.

Kathryn Ervin: Right, so they were important in that way, they were also important in connecting me to the Community, and when I say Community I mean social events church.

Kathryn Ervin: fraternities and sororities events of interest you know Black history month celebration.

Kathryn Ervin: You know the quba for.

Kathryn Ervin: Kwanzaa and those kinds of events and introducing me to wear those things were in the Community and who was doing them.

Kathryn Ervin: And, and then the Community, of course, insisting that, no, no, no, you have to come, you have to be here, you have to be a part of this, you have to.

Kathryn Ervin: And building the bridges that are in fact the bridges that helped change the whole institution.

Kathryn Ervin: Right, so when I came in as a junior faculty Member, you know I'm doing my.

Kathryn Ervin: Work on my college work, yes, yes, but there's also this oh what's the Black culture foundation doing what's the Kwanzaa celebration what's the so and so and those people are also then moving into positions in.

Kathryn Ervin: Governance right I'm thinking now Amina Carter when I met her, she was, I think she was.

Kathryn Ervin: On the board at Cal State San Bernardino and then, subsequently became a senator etc., etc., etc. share around another person that went on to become these.

Kathryn Ervin: These leaders in the larger legislative political arena and then started to leverage the university well why don't you have why can't you provide well, what are you doing, for you know and so.

Kathryn Ervin: So, so in this kind of way the Community help to sort of carry you along to become a part of the larger movement to improve campus life to improve outlook to improve what happens to faculty staff and students on campus does that make sense.

Kathryn Ervin: Yes, yeah so the Community is very critical and I don't I don't think I had the same sense of community, when I was at Michigan .

Kathryn Ervin: I mean you other people right, you know Michigan 's a big college town, I mean it's ginormous at that time, it seems like it.

Kathryn Ervin: And my sense of other than you know other little entities on campus that I could interact with I don't remember having a sense of oh here's the church here's the grocery store here's the.

Kathryn Ervin: In the way that I did here at San Bernardino so that to me that says that's a huge difference is that it's the being able to say you know, this is, this is my folk they're over here.

Kathryn Ervin: I mean you know.

Kathryn Ervin: you're going to be an anthropologist you should.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: know, yes, yes.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: well.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: What was your involvement with the CSU SP Black faculty staff and sitting Association and the role this organization has played on campus.

Kathryn Ervin: Well, they made me a member right away right.

Kathryn Ervin: And then.

Kathryn Ervin: Building, especially for as a junior faculty Member as a beginning faculty Member building my awareness of how different things were in other areas of the campus that Black students were really suffering.

Kathryn Ervin: example in the hard sciences and some of the you know because I'm over in the arts and we're you know we're very open and very well.

Kathryn Ervin: I mean that is that is part of the nature of what the arts do, and in the college of arts and letters communication all of those philosophy we all live over there in that bubble meanwhile over in you know physics and some.

Kathryn Ervin: Some other disciplines students were having a much harder time, so the Black faculty and staff was critical.

Kathryn Ervin: In saying you know you may be doing all right, but other people are not and keeping that awareness going, and also forwarding the concerns of students, which frequently get lost, I mean we say students have the most the most invested.

Kathryn Ervin: The most skin in the game they're paying for the education, but their concerns are frequently masked under this Oh well, you know they didn't show up or oh did.

Kathryn Ervin: didn't turn in the work on time oh always late Oh, you know, and so the that those.

Kathryn Ervin: Now we call them micro aggressions but those are the ways in which systems perpetuate themselves right if we if we allow the divide between faculty and students to be well you know they don't know as much they're not as good there you know, whatever those.

Kathryn Ervin: Stereotypes continue to be perpetrated then they continue to be perpetuated right that's the waste down that's just the way.

Kathryn Ervin: You know and it's not just the way students are.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, so the Black faculty and staff, I think, was on the front of sort of saying no that's not true, we got you know these Rhodes scholars over here, we got these as students over here.

Kathryn Ervin: And we got this bottleneck here that nobody can get through it's the model leg it's not the people it's the bottleneck that's the problem.

Kathryn Ervin: And really arguing with the administration and making the Community aware, going back to the Community and saying this problem is happening at Cal State, we need you to make some noise, so that they hear it, not just from us, but from you all so Black faculty staff has been.

Kathryn Ervin: Critical in advancing and illuminating and supporting and.

Kathryn Ervin: I think one of the best events that we do is the what they call the Black red the Black graduation.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Recognition, yes, yes.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: heard all about it.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, and the Latino Grad and degrees, I mean so that there's something about being in a room with those successes and last year.

Kathryn Ervin: or this year, rather, which was our first sort of in person, one.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, to have students get up and say and I'm finishing and I'm going to Grad school and become a physics blah blah blah.

Kathryn Ervin: or I'm finishing, and I have three kids and my kids are all here or I'm finishing, and you know I mean it it's what the jobs about really so the so the importance of.

Kathryn Ervin: That uplift and celebration, as well the pioneer awards which celebrates the Community, you know those ways of you know you're a student, you know school is hard.

Kathryn Ervin: For you, so you need somebody to say no, but look at how great this is and look at how worth it, this is and that's part of what.

Kathryn Ervin: The Black faculty staff does to is to continue saying yes their success, and here it is and here's an example and here's an example and here's an example, you know so there's not always trauma.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Yes, yes there's some positives and there.

Kathryn Ervin: there's a positive.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Okay right.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Well, could you briefly share the impact that the CS USB affirmative action Advisory Committee and the educational opportunity program has had on increasing diversity equity and inclusion at the university.

Kathryn Ervin: wow.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: I can like reread it or.

Kathryn Ervin: Well I'm trying to think.

Kathryn Ervin: I'm trying to think of it, there has been so much done.

Kathryn Ervin: And I think you know, hopefully, one of the things that's illuminated in these conversations that you're capturing is how critical that was at the beginning, except for the you know, no one was looking to say why are.

Kathryn Ervin: Why are Black students not graduating, why are Black students not being retained, you know, except that there was an EOP Program.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, sitting there checking the boxes and providing the space for those students to come in and say.

Kathryn Ervin: I don't know how to get this is a class I really need I'm not gonna graduate nobody's listening to me, what do I do you know so EOP.

Kathryn Ervin: Especially and I think he was before the affirmative action Advisory Committee I think they were they came along later, but LP was the.

Kathryn Ervin: The first group that started to identify those sort of roadblocks those places where student he has to take this, but the class is only taught at this time, and this complex with five other English classes, that they be.

Kathryn Ervin: So they started to identify those roadblocks and they also started to alert.

Kathryn Ervin: The faculty and follow up right at once upon a time, I guess, they still do.

Kathryn Ervin: You would you would get this on below that had you know, a stack of papers these five students are in your class they're part of the EOP program what's their progress and we get those about.

Kathryn Ervin: Before midterms sometimes because I'd be like I don't know it's for zero K or no I've never seen them or whatever, so that kind of tracking of students, which is critical to.

Kathryn Ervin: To the to those at risk populations, not just Black students brown students Asian students who are new to the university somebody has to say hey you don't want to class, why not, you know what's up something happen or you.

Kathryn Ervin: don't like the class or what you know somebody's following up so that was very important, and then the affirmative action advisory committee saying what steps can university take we don't have any Black guidance counselors.

Kathryn Ervin: We don't have any Black.

Kathryn Ervin: Mental health professionals over in the.

Kathryn Ervin: The clinic we don't have any Black faculty in this department what's why, why not there, there are no Black people in this area, or no ground, I was that possible right and starting to push against.

Kathryn Ervin: Remember, I started off with the Academy starting to push against the Academy, and say you know the Academy can't all be made up of you old guys.

Kathryn Ervin: there's gotta be some new guys coming in, where are they have you interviewed them do you want to bring them in you want to you know and then starting to say well.

Kathryn Ervin: If you're going to bring this person in you're going to have to provide some research money some travel money some incentives to keep the Faculty in place and to keep the staff in place, you know, to give them better opportunities for advancement, to give them recognition as.

Kathryn Ervin: There are units within divisions, you know some recognition of their that they're not just toiling away over there, that they are an important part of what the university does and the critical role that they play.

Kathryn Ervin: And so those policies and changes are all the result of that pressure early on, and then the importance to me as a faculty Member.

Kathryn Ervin: Over time, as I started to get these reports, you know here are five students who are in this, how are they dealing and then I could start to say to myself, how are they doing.

Kathryn Ervin: You know.

Kathryn Ervin: Right, you know what what's happening, you know you Okay, you need anything.

Kathryn Ervin: Given, given my understanding of how the challenges that a student faces getting through university and they weren't necessarily all Black students.

Kathryn Ervin: But these are students that have come into the university with a challenge, and one of our university Presidents Al Carnegie said in one of his many.

Kathryn Ervin: complications are times that he spoke to the whole faculty be the solution, he said, have a student comes to you with a problem don't send them down the hall solve the problem.

Kathryn Ervin: wow yeah and that you know I took that to heart.

Kathryn Ervin: And I'm sure others did and that was.

Kathryn Ervin: Part of this, you know somebody in up call them don't send the note just hey This is my class and I haven't seen them, you know yeah follow up check blah blah blah.

Kathryn Ervin: And you know turning the creating a different climate building a university for everyone and recognizing that if you want everyone here you got to make everyone welcome somebody don't like to sit in a wicker chair you're gonna have to go get.

Kathryn Ervin: My visa bill further back go get a film.

it's.

Kathryn Ervin: Not everybody each that so absolutely besides.

Kathryn Ervin: That that mentality.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: sounds amazing, especially with Carnegie I think.

Kathryn Ervin: That was that was like.

Kathryn Ervin: Vice I took to heart, I was like yep you're right I should I shall from now on, I promise.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Well, how have things changed for CSP Black faculty staff and students, since you first came to the university.

well.

Kathryn Ervin: The more things change, the more they remain the same, you know.

Kathryn Ervin: Really.

Kathryn Ervin: Well, I think.

Kathryn Ervin: I think that some great things are that the amount of representation, how the face of the University has changed, certainly in the upper administration dean's chairs.

Kathryn Ervin: and other administrative offices, we have a wide diversity of experiences and types of people in those positions and that's a good thing.

Kathryn Ervin: So that's been a major change as part of that affirmative action you know we really have to it's not enough to say you're committed to diversity you've got to put some diversity in place you've got to make it possible for diversity to happen you've got to give you know.

Kathryn Ervin: you've got to give some teeth to that initiative, and I think the University has come a long way in that.

Kathryn Ervin: I think that I already mentioned the affinity centers the pan africanist you know all of those kind of welcoming places and creating and creating specific safe spaces, I mean university education is.

Kathryn Ervin: You know it's really hard for the student going through it, when you think about the difficulty of the classes and just.

Kathryn Ervin: You know it's at eight o'clock in the morning and if I don't take it, I can't take the next one, and all of those things, but also the difficulty of the university student going back to their community which may not be receptive Oh, you went to college miss smarty pants college girl.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: But you.

Kathryn Ervin: know you know what I mean you make it that kind of resistance, on the other side and the challenges you got a degree, leaving here now you gotta jump a whole other set of hurdles.

Kathryn Ervin: trying to get into a professional practice somewhere trying to get an opportunity to do the thing you were educated, you know so there's.

Kathryn Ervin: there's hardships all along the way, and I think the university is now in the past I'll say years has really started to consider all of those pieces, how can we build better relationships with the Community and send.

Kathryn Ervin: For example, how can we, how can we create teachers and how can we make sure that a teacher of a different background is going into a school that will recognize that appreciate that background that we're not sending them into a school where they're going to go.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, not that she won't know anything you know what I mean.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: How do we.

Kathryn Ervin: How do we set up a relationship so that their success on the other side, how do we reach out to alumni and make them feel like you know you came out of here, and you owe the institution you, you have an obligation to help the ones behind you, so I think we're doing.

Kathryn Ervin: I think that those changes are happening with the with the alumni association they're starting to say no wait.

Kathryn Ervin: You know grant Black graduates want to wreck want to reach out to Black alumni they want to know what happened on the other side, and they want to hear from somebody who looks like them right.

Kathryn Ervin: Like to you know alarms you know, everybody right wants to wants to talk to their group, so I think that has been a huge improvement, I think we, we are still and especially postcode we are really going to get challenged with Community because the Community here on campus.

Kathryn Ervin: And we have access to all kinds of technology, you know boom the world stopped and that we had zoom we had email we had Baba blah, the Community maybe didn't.

Kathryn Ervin: Right and that got revealed in a major way the difficulty of trying to conduct remote classes with people who might have to take a class in their car with instructors whose Internet wasn't gonna work.

Kathryn Ervin: Right, so that, so all those kind of inequities got revealed, and it also became a member of a number of community groups, and this is the first year that those groups are being able to meet again face to face.

Kathryn Ervin: Which means for two years here's a weird thing that we didn't think about the sense of how we do things, has been lost.

Kathryn Ervin: yeah right, I mean, because we would plan, the annual picnic and you're going to do this I'm going to do that you're going to do, blah blah blah, but what we couldn't picnic for two years, so who kept the notes on how we do the annual picnic I don't know I thought you had them right.

Kathryn Ervin: Right.

Kathryn Ervin: So we were all kind of like oh yeah we're gonna need oh so Oh, did you reserve space, I thought Oh, did I was I supposed to do that so there's a lot of that going on right now, as we try to figure out and at the same time.

Kathryn Ervin: You know, we were connected to the people we knew, but there are new people now So how do we.

Kathryn Ervin: How do we invite the new people to the picnic if they weren't part of the old people, you know what I mean so yeah.

Kathryn Ervin: And I think one of the biggest challenges facing Black faculty and staff and the Community is now rebuilding that relationship that you know I talked about how great it was back in the old days when I came.

Kathryn Ervin: Now we lost after two years, how do we go back and say you know let's have this event, again, knowing that some people won't come because they don't want to

be in a crowded space, and you know how do we make all of those adjustments and invite community and.

Kathryn Ervin: Let the Community know about the new faculty staff and students that are coming in.

Kathryn Ervin: it's a lot.

Kathryn Ervin: Absolutely I got a yeah.

Kathryn Ervin: A lot it's a lot.

Kathryn Ervin: yeah, but I think you know I think we will figure out a way, I mean, and I, and I know that.

Kathryn Ervin: Having talked with my colleagues that many of us are very excited about the chance to be back face to face with students to be back with the Community, do you accent okay let's things are messed up grab that I'll grab this let's go.

Kathryn Ervin: No.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Absolutely, I feel the same way.

Kathryn Ervin: yeah.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: And is there anything else you'd like to share with me today.

Kathryn Ervin: um wow can I think of anything else it's been I am in the process of retiring.

Kathryn Ervin: Yes, after showing you that it's been years of teaching.

Kathryn Ervin: I won't be entirely stop you know you don't stop doing anything you do it in a different way.

Kathryn Ervin: But I really appreciate the ways that Cal State has been flexible has been listening, I mean it doesn't always listen right away, sometimes you have to say things two or three times for get through.

Kathryn Ervin: But I really appreciate an environment in which I think things do filter up and they filter back down.

Kathryn Ervin: And the older, I get the more I recognize that change is slow, but change comes you know and.

Kathryn Ervin: And, and I think you know it's been a great deal of you know, the buildings have changed and the campuses shares Okay, now we have to go back to work on the people inside the film.

Kathryn Ervin: board so I'm very grateful for the time that I've had, and I still think it's a great place to be.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: that's great Thank you.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: yeah well yeah Thank you so much for your time, Professor Ervin and thank you for sharing your journey.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: see us.

Kathryn Ervin: All right, it's been a pleasure talking with you.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: yeah Thank you it's been a pleasure.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: All right.

Kathryn Ervin: You too.

Olivia-Leigh Willhide-James: Thank you.

Kathryn Ervin: Bye.

End of Interview:

[00:46:03]