

## **Marissa Williams Oral History**

Recorded October 12, 2024, at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, during Homecoming / Reunion.

Interviewer: Jenny Johnson-Riley ("JJR"), Pacific University Class of 1998.

This transcription was made through AI with manual corrections, clarifications, and editing of some repetitions and filler words, March 2025.

[JJR] 0:01

Hi. This is Jenny Johnson Riley, and today is October 12, 2024, Pacific Homecoming, and I am sitting with Marissa Williams. And Marissa, you graduated in 2019. What field of study did you have while you were at Pacific?

[Williams] 0:17

I majored in Psychology, with a minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies.

[JJR] 0:22

Tell me about the Gender and Sexuality Studies, what was that like?

[Williams] 0:28

That was very spur of the moment. I didn't actually decide that I wanted to minor in it until I had taken a class and learned that there was a minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies. So my first semester at Pacific, I took an Intro to Queer Studies with Jason Damron, and it was awesome. It was so cool. And so I just wanted to be in more classes like that; like it really opened my perspective to things that I hadn't really thought about before. So, I think once I discovered there was a minor and more classes in that, I likely took, definitely one each year, but might even have taken one each semester. I loved it.

[JJR] 1:19

What activities or clubs or organizations were you involved with while you were at Pacific?

[Williams] 1:24

I was involved in Greek life. I had been part of the Delta Chi Delta. It was a sorority at the time. Then the last year that I graduated, it changed to a "diaternity." I was also part of Student Senate for a period of time. I was a representative while I worked for the Center for Gender Equity. So that was a job, but also kind of an activity too, that I really enjoyed, and I also -- I don't know if it's necessarily an activity -- but I really enjoyed being a student mentor. So there were lots of opportunities that I looked for, like an FYS mentor I was for a couple years, and I mentored for an Intro to Gender and Sexuality Studies class. And, yeah, really enjoyed doing that. I think I mentored for two of those classes.

[JJR] 2:27

And where did you live while you were at Pacific?

[Williams] 2:32

I started in Walter, and was there for my freshman year. I moved to Burlingham for my sophomore year. And then I think it was actually the spring term of my sophomore year that I moved off campus. So I was in Forest Grove for the rest of sophomore year and junior year, and then I moved to Hillsboro for, I think, my last year. Yeah, so I was only on campus for almost two years.

[JJR] 3:07

What were some of the biggest changes you saw?

[Williams] 3:23

I feel like a lot of changes that I saw... I feel like I was here when the Office of Equity and Inclusion really started to gain its footing, and the Multicultural Center started up. So that was really cool to see the impact that that organization could have when I was there, when it didn't exist, versus when I left, to see it existing, and the meaning that it brought to so many students.

[Williams]

A change that happened right as I was leaving, was the Director for the Center for Gender Equity at the time, Martha Rampton, [who] was the founder of the Center for Gender Equity; the year I graduated was the year that she retired. So that was just a very interesting shift that I didn't get to see who took over, necessarily, but knowing that, there was a lot of change that was going to be happening as I left. I wasn't as involved in Pacific, my freshman year. I felt like I didn't really do a ton. Sophomore year was really when it picked up.

[JJR] 4:40

And you talked about the impact that the Multicultural Center and the DEI office had. What were some of the things you noticed about the impact that it had?

[Williams] 4:50

It just seemed to have a place for people to go that wanted support and community in that area; as well as giving -- because there was a space to go -- there was more of a voice to it. There were statements and opinions and movements that came from it. So, I think that just having a space and dedicating a space to that, was very meaningful. I think when I was part of Greek life and the Center for Gender Equity, there were folks that were part of that, that were also part of the Multicultural Center. So, getting to see their community expanding too, and the fulfillment that they got from that, was really important.

[JJR] 5:41

Were there any major controversies or things like that that were happening, or even particular historical events that were going on while you were here?

[Williams] 5:50

I was here during the 2016 election. So I remember the day after that: there were classes cancelled; I remember there being a meeting and conversation in the UC, people crying and upset; I felt like that event was really interesting to experience on a college campus.

[Williams]

There was a controversy, actually, about the t-shirt that I'm wearing right now. It was a poster for a play that the Center for Gender Equity put on -- the Vagina Monologues -- and when this poster was put up, it was taken down. [\*See note at end.] Every time it was put up, they were taken down, and we were constantly putting them up as they were being taken down. There was actually a mediated conversation at one point -- well, actually, multiple mediated conversations -- with ACE Board and the Multicultural Center also.

[Williams]

There were a lot of thoughts and opinions about the appropriateness of the poster. And as I was part of the Center for Gender Equity, we really saw it as a advocating point for disability, and didn't see an issue with it. But that was something that was very much like, [a] very contentious time, I would say. Like when I was going to classes and trying to see if the poster that I had put up was still there; and some folks that were part of both the Center for Gender Equity and the Multicultural Center being kind of in the middle of it in some ways, and that being a little uncomfortable. I remember the one mediated conversation with the Center for Gender Equity and the Multicultural Center: it felt, at the beginning, very "us versus them" and not great, but I think it was a really good conversation to at least help people talk to each other more, instead of being in their own little silos.

[JJR] 8:27

How did the university respond to that at the time?

[Williams] 8:35

It was difficult, because the Director of the Center, Martha Rampton, was very much advocating for us, and helped us have the meeting with ACE Board... Although [when] leaving that meeting of the ACE Board, [it] didn't feel like there was necessarily... like we were on the same page, or there was much resolved. We didn't change the poster, and the event still happened. So I think -- I don't think there was an official response necessarily, from the university. I think it was more just between various organizations. I think there was a little bit of, well, "this is a play that will end at some

point." So I think it was kind of like, "We can kind of wait this out and they will move on. There will be other events and posters that will take its place." I don't remember a response from the university.

[JJR] 9:42

Is there anything else you want to tell me about, about your time at Pacific?

[Williams] 9:50

I think the only addition that I'll give is that I really have a lot of gratitude to Pacific for the opportunities that I was able to take advantage of. Pacific is the same size as the high school that I came from, so it didn't feel necessarily different, but I appreciated the relationships that I was able to cultivate and the community that I was able to be part of. I think it helped me figure out what I wanted to do; and what I have done since Pacific is working in communities and doing a lot of advocacy-type work as well. So I think that Pacific was really integral in making that happen for me.

[JJR] 10:42

All right, thank you so much for stopping by.

\*The poster that William discusses was an advertisement for the 2018 performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, which was sponsored by CGE. Pacific had hosted this play multiple times over the previous two decades. The 2018 controversy centered on its promotional poster, which included imagery of an almost-nude woman of color. Some groups on campus regarded this imagery as objectification, while others regarded it as positive.