History of Black Women at the University of Maryland
Interviewee: Monette Austin Bailey
Interviewer(s): Mekdes Sisay, Miranda Morris
Date: November 17, 2017

Morris: So, please state your name and current occupation for the record.

Bailey: Sure, it's Monette Bailey, and I'm an organizational development consultant for the University of Maryland Center for Leadership and Organizational Change.

Morris: And can you tell us a little bit about yourself before being an undergraduate in the University of Maryland? Like where you grew up and your family?

Bailey: Okay, I'm born in New Orleans. That's where I'm born. Both my parents are from there. We moved to the east coast right after I got out of high school. My mother remarried and my step-father's from the east coast, so that's how we got here. Otherwise, I wouldn't have come. And, we lived in the Maryland area, and instead of going back home to go to school, one of the schools I wanted to go to, even when I was home, was on the east coast. I wanted to come to either New York or D.C., so we were already here. One school I applied to was the University of Maryland and their journalism program.

Sisay: So, why did you want to be a journalism major?

Bailey: That's a good question. I think part of it is just nosiness, honestly, and part of it is stories. I love hearing people's stories. I can sit and listen to people talk about their lives and why they do things and… So even in high school I worked on our school's newspaper. And I knew I didn't want to be a writer in the sense of creating novels, but I wanted to be able to write and share people's stories. So, I knew I wanted to be in journalism, I just wasn't sure how. I didn't even realize journalism was as big as it was. You could be an editor and still be a journalist, you know. So I majored in both print and broadcast tracks here at Maryland because I couldn't decide. I eventually chose print. I did a broadcast internship and I didn't like it as much.

Sisay: So, what were your favorite classes within the journalism major?

Bailey: Oh, wow. You realize this was a long time ago, right? [All laugh] I had a women in journalism course. I can't remember the specific contents of the course, but Maureen Beasley, who's now a professor at Maryland's journalism school, taught it. And what I loved about the course and Professor Beasley was that she made it clear that women have a place in journalism and have stories to tell, and they're gonna tell them differently than their male counterparts. And she impressed upon the whole class, male and female, but [especially] females, like this is a tough business; it doesn't mean that you don't need to be in it, and it doesn't mean I don't want you in it, and I will do whatever I can. And she talked about the history of women in journalism and the history of women, you know, doing news, whether it was a community newspaper or informal networks. That was a powerful class, and I attached myself to Professor Beasley for the rest of my college career actually. And then another course I took—it wasn't as interesting, it was just helpful—it was a journalism law course. You have a romantic idea of running around with your notebook or your tape recorder [Morris and Sisay laugh], but you really needed to be aware of how that could go wrong; or how people could interpret it wrong; or how your notes could be called into as evidence. And just, I never was aware of that part of journalism. I was always aware of the other part. And the professor, again, made it clear that it was our responsibility as a journalist to be as objective and as honest as we could in what we were doing. And it wasn't just this sensational career, where you dash around getting stories from people.

Morris: So, we understand that you contributed to two publications at University of Maryland, one being *The Diamondback* and the other being *The Eclipse*. So, our first question is, what was your position in *The Eclipse*?

Bailey: I mean I was a reporter just generally. At some point I was—I served as an editor. But I can't tell you for how long. I honestly don't remember. I know just because of the part where you were working on layout, like I was one of the ones in the newsroom at night trying to make sure the stories were all in and correct and edited. It was tough because then you can't call anyone to verify things because it's ten o'clock at night and no one's answering their phone. I do remember that very, very well. So, I did serve as an editor, probably less than I was a reporter, just in terms of

time. I don't remember how long for each one. But reporter first; editor next.

Morris: Did you serve the same positions at *The Diamondback*?

Bailey: Unh-uh, just a reporter at *The Diamondback*. There were a lot of reporters at *The Diamondback*, and sometimes you didn't get a story for a while just because there were more bodies than there were stories, often, and space to put them.

Morris: So, what made you want to join *The Eclipse* or *The Diamondback*?

Bailey: Again, part of it was just my major. So I knew that if I wanted to be a journalist, I needed to get some experience. And at that point, when you come into school, you know, you don't have clips [for a job], or even in high school, nobody really gives a flip [Bailey laughs] about that when you go in for a job. So, I needed the experience, I needed the clips, and I wanted to learn. I had at least one class—I'm not sure it's still a requirement now—where you had to have clips, published clips, somewhere as part of the requirement for the class. So, that was an easy way to do it.

Sisay: All right, so *The Eclipse* was formerly known as *The Black Explosion* and the name changed in 1985. Did you have a role in changing the name from *The Black Explosion* to *The Eclipse*?

Bailey: I didn't have a role in it. I was obviously here when it happened and there was lots of discussion in the why. I actually really liked the name *The Black Explosion* because to me it was more… [Bailey sighs] like it was active. And *The Eclipse* to me felt more like a quieter name. But then other people had the argument, well, no, but an eclipse is when, you know, there's a different kind of life— So I saw both points. I really liked *The Black Explosion*. I didn't mind what it was named. But I wasn't involved in the decision to make the change. I was just here for the discussion when it happened.

Sisay: That kind of eases into the next question. Do you know why the decision was made?

Bailey: I do not. I'm sorry, I don't. If I do, I don't remember.

Morris: Okay. So, what kind of stories did you publish in *The Eclipse* or *The Diamondback*?

Bailey: [Bailey sighs] You know, it's funny I kept some of these clips, and if I had known I would have looked at them before I came in, so I'm sorry—

Morris: It's okay.

Bailey: —because I'm sure I still have some. I don't remember as much for *The Diamondback* because that was a much more general assignment. That, again, that was really—you were lucky if you got your story in. Because there were just so many of us at the time trying to get our clips for *The Diamondback*, and only so much space in the paper. So, I don't remember very specifically what I did for *The Diamondback* just because it could have been anything. And because of *The Eclipse*'s focus on the black community, obviously, a lot of our stories—I remember doing stories about social life. So there were stories about the Miss Unity pageant, or the different social efforts for the cause kind of things. Then I also remember that we did—and I'm not sure, I can't remember specifically if I edited these—stories about the lack of diversity on our campus, and what the university as a system was doing about it. There weren't a lot of black faculty and staff on campus. Is that something that was being looked at? How is it being looked at? I remember there was something we did once on black greek systems. Not versus, but sort of how they're different than white greek systems and why. There's housing for—at the time, anyway––there was housing for the white greek system and not housing for the black greek system. And why? I mean, is it finances of the different clubs? What was it? And why didn't they have representation that way?

Sisay: Also, did you keep in touch with any members of *The Eclipse*?

Bailey: I mean for a minute. As of now, no, not really.

Morris: Do you recall by any chance the Maryland Media Incorporated?

Bailey: I remember it being the umbrella. I don't remember a lot about it, but I remember it. The parent sort of company.

Sisay: Yeah, they were the non-profit that owned and produced campus publications—

Bailey: Right.

Sisay: —including *Diamondback* and *Eclipse*. Did you know if the Maryland Media Inc. influenced the content of *The Eclipse*, like what went in? What you guys did while under it?

Bailey: I don't know about influenced. I remember conversations about intervening in content. Not whether or not they were telling us what to do, but I remember there being conversations about there being some input. But I don't remember the extent to which they had it. That comes to mind more for me from *The Eclipse* side than *The Diamondback* side. Those conversations didn't really happen at *The Diamondback*. But I honestly didn't hang out in the newsroom at *The Diamondback* very much, I just didn't. I would spend a lot more time with *The Eclipse* staff only because it was smaller; there were fewer of us. And there were conversations about how independent is independent, and if we had to even worry about pissing somebody off. Do we have to run our story budget by somebody, for example. I wasn't the editor-in-chief or a managing editor, so it wasn't my decision to make. But I remember as, you know, as a staff having that conversation and wondering if how far—what kind of stories are we gonna get to do, and should we—before we even get it out there and get in trouble—do we scale it back?

Morris: Okay so, we're gonna switch gears a little bit now, and we're gonna ask you some questions about your experience as a resident assistant.

Bailey: Okay.

Morris: So first, what made you decide to become a resident assistant?

Bailey: I was a commuter student, and I knew that my family couldn't afford to put me on campus. And the commuting wasn't bad, it wasn't that far from the campus, but I realized that I was missing a piece of campus life. And I just thought, well, this is one way to do it, it won't cost my family any money, and it could be fun. So, that was pretty much it. I wanted a different connection with the campus. It was a really big campus. I'd come from a big high school, so I wasn't worried about that part, but I just felt like—and

I worked, so I was coming in and out of campus really only to go to class, and I just, you know, I just didn't like that as much. I thought this would be a different way to be on campus. It was! [All laugh]

Morris: And how would you describe your experience as a resident assistant and having to interact with people of different backgrounds?

Bailey: Honestly, I didn't interact with people of different backgrounds that much, only because I went to three high schools [Bailey chuckles] before I graduated, and they were three very different places, so dealing with different people was something I wasn't unused to that. So, the biggest adjustment for me wasn't the dealing with different people, it was being responsible at some level for all these people. That's what was different. Honestly, my floor wasn't that diverse. And so that wasn't new to me. And their backgrounds, like sort of where they came from, I'd lived for a little bit in Texas, so I had, you know, I had—that was a different mentality than the D.C. area mentality. You know, that didn't actually bother me that much, that wasn't the biggest adjustment. I have to tell you, the biggest adjustment was by the time I became a resident assistant, I was also pregnant. And so, I kept my residency—my position, but we knew ultimately it was a discussion. I discussed it with our RD and Residency Life as a whole, knowing that at the end of that fall semester I would need to move off campus because I was due to have a baby in March, and that wasn't going to work so well if I was a resident assistant. But they were beautiful and gracious and supportive and let me stay through that fall semester. So by the end of that [semester], I'm showing. So, my biggest adjustment was being pregnant on a floor full of freshmen girls, being young myself, and trying to be pregnant and a resident assistant and a student and make sure they understood that this is what happens when you don't make good decisions. [Bailey laughs] This is what happens when you don't sort of pay attention to what you're doing. Resident assistants always do planning. That's what we do, we do programming. So, we had a two-part program on good decisions, and I got to be the object lesson for—and not in a bad way, I did it myself, like I created it with another RA—we did a whole thing with the Health Center on birth control and supporting conversations, and, you know, when to say no, and it was actually wonderful. I'm not sure Resident Life saw it quite that way at the time [Bailey laughs], but I, again, I really appreciated the support. So my biggest adjustment was that! And the parents. I had a couple of

parents who were upset that I was setting a bad example and wanted me out of that job and not to be resident assistant anymore.

Morris: So did you work with the Health Center to create conversations about it?

Bailey: A little bit. It wasn't a deep program. If I remember this right, again, because this was probably thirty years ago [Bailey laughs]—I remember having somebody from Health Center come and talk because I'm not a health and sex-ed expert, so I wasn't going to give the talk. But I had someone from the Health Center come and address the girls on the floor, because it was an all-girls floor, about making good choices. And then, I talked a little bit about my sort of how I got to where I am right now. And the father was also a student on campus, and I had advised him to come; he didn't take me up on that offer! [Bailey laughs] He wasn't quite that open-minded. But I liked that I was able to talk about it in a way that said, look guys, this is not the end of my life. It is a switch. It is a shift. I'm going to have to stop going to school for a little bit to go have a baby, but I'm going to come back, which I did. So, I liked that I didn't necessarily start a formal program, but the Health Center understood how this could be important and helpful. And, as far as I can remember anyway, they would come over and talk with the girls about birth control, you know, not in a deep dive. And the girls were great. They threw me a baby shower before I left. It was really sweet [Bailey chuckles]. And then when I came back as a student, and now I have a baby on the outside, I stopped by the dorm to visit the floor and the girls were still there. And I had plenty of baby issues, but I never called them up on it because that made me a little nervous! [Bailey laughs] But it was sweet, it was very sweet.

Sisay: So, did you make any friends through this position, like any other RAs?

Bailey: I did! And a couple of them I am still friends with. The RA community is a really—because of the training you do and because of the fact that you're living on a floor with a bunch of people who—I guess you're not ultimately responsible for them, but you're kind of responsible for them—that community of people, there was plenty of times where we all met as RAs with your RDs, with the communities, and you talk about what's happening on your floor. So, you become friends, and not in a—some of us anyway––not in that fluffy, oh my God, we're gonna keep in touch, oh my God, totally, and then you never talk to her again. But in a, I've seen you through some rough stuff, I've helped you at a tough time, I've seen you

when you're not doing well. You know, one RA friend, we had a guy who came to the floor drunk yelling for his girlfriend because apparently they had broken up and he was distraught. But I was scared, he was a big guy and I'm pregnant, and the last thing I want to do is fight with a big drunk guy yelling for his girlfriend. But a fellow RA helped sort of talked him down, walked him out, and we're still friends. Because when you see someone that, like that's someone you want to hang onto. And so yeah, I am still friends with some—not a lot—but some of my RA friends.

Sisay: The next question is did you meet any people who shared, like, very different views?

Bailey: A couple. I mean, there were some, but they weren't views that I hadn't already seen. I come from a Christian home, and my stepfather's a minister. So I made that clear upfront to people because I didn't want people to be freaking out on me if you hear me say something about God or prayer, I'm not gonna come convert you, but just know that's my family. And I had a couple people say, well I don't believe there is a God. And I'm like, okay. We would sometimes have—not debates—but conversations about that. I did—not on my floor specifically—I did encounter a couple of people who were racist. It was clear me being in a position of authority as a black person didn't sit right with them. Okay. But again, it's not something I hadn't already seen in my life, so I wasn't too taken aback by it. Sad, I'm disappointed. And everytime something like that happens like when somebody—it doesn't make it any easier just because you've dealt with it before. Maybe I am not as rocked by it as I would have been.

Morris: Did this position as a resident assistant, did it increase your appreciation for the University of Maryland?

Bailey: It did. It did. Yeah, I wanna say it did. It was a different way to see the university, and it gave me a chance to help other people's experiences at the university start off in a certain way. Like I couldn't make it all whatever, but at least their contact with me, I hope, was positive and open and warm. You know a lot of us, that freshman year is really pivotal; you're away from home for the first time, or you're, you know, living with strange people, and I wanted that not to be horrible and scary. I had one girl who cried for like the first three or four days she was there because she was just so homesick. And the way that my resident community helped me support her, because at some point she was like, I need to leave, I need to

go home, I can't do this. And I knew she was gonna be okay. I knew she was. We just had to see. And she was, eventually, and she thrived. But the university community made it a point to like, we have resources. If she really needs to go we can talk about that and talk about the processes for this girl and… It just made me realize that the university has some issues; every university does. And it has problems. And even then there were things that could have been… But as a whole I walked out of the position, especially the way they treated me, like I'm pregnant and 19, there's all kinds of things they could have done that weren't pleasant, and they didn't. They let me keep my job, they let me stay on the floor. I mean, they didn't have to do any of that. And there was no formal contract that said I had to go, but they could have found it inconvenient, but they didn't. And even after I had the baby and came back to school, I said thank you to some of those folks, and they would always ask, oh, bring Malcolm by! I wanna see him! And how are you doing? One of the reasons I came back to work at the university when I found out that there was an opening was because of my undergrad experience. For all the things that didn't feel good sometimes, there were always good ones.

Morris: Okay. So, we're switching now into the last portion of the interview. And we're going to ask some questions about the political climate of the campus during your time as an undergraduate. So, first question is what were the political/ social events going on in the country at the time—

Bailey: Oh my goodness.

Morris: —[Morris laughs] that impacted the political environment on the campus?

Bailey: You all should have sent these questions in advance! [All laugh] I have no clue, okay, so I was here [19]85 to [19]89. Specifically on the campus, I was here the year Len Bias died of a drug overdose. So, campus specifically, the climate changed dramatically because we realized as a university we had a problem. Not necessarily because of Len Bias' overdose, but the whole sports program came into question. And then, it was a national conversation on how universities view athletes, especially star athletes, and whether they're commodities or students or young people, or like, what are they, and how are we treating them, and what are we doing with them?

Morris: To clarify, Len Bias, was he the basketball player who signed with the Celtics and—

Bailey: And that very night, OD'd. Yep. In celebration. Yeah, so good guess, that was him. So that happened my summer of [19]86, I think. I wanna say summer of [19]86. And so, there was this—fear's not the right word, I can't think of the right word—this caution, this awareness. And then people began to ask how easy are drugs available on campus? And because we're right next to a metropolitan area, we had lots of questions about the security of the campus, you know. Who's getting onto our campus? Who has access to the students here? I remember for people who were in Resident Life it was, you know, you need to stress the importance of, you know, security on the buildings. You guys now, you can't get in any building now, almost at all in any way, and I think, in part, that sort of was an evolution of we need to do a better job of… Because back then you could prop open any door and an alarm wouldn't go off, it would just stay propped open. And people would constantly jam things into the, you know, the part of the door that clicks out, they would jam things into it so the door couldn't click shut. So the door wouldn't be open, but it wasn't actually locked, you'd just push it. But nothing would go off. No alarm would go off. It would just be open! [Bailey chuckles] Or people would really just hold the door for people, and let people stream into the building, and there were a lot of concerns now about safety issues. So, I don't know about nationally what was going on politically, I honestly can't tell you I can't remember because by then I had a baby and all I could focus on was getting out of school, [Bailey laughs] and trying to graduate and get a job. But I do remember that because that was pivotal for the campus, and then it became pivotal for the country because it began talking about this on a larger scale. College athletes and that whole debate about, well, if they're in a revenue-generating sport, but we can't pay them, but we give them things, and then we don't hold them to the same academic standards, and why aren't we? We had lots of people who were—couldn't even qualify to graduate because they just weren't doing well. But they were star athletes or they were on teams that were doing well, so it was okay. And then it became not okay.

[Someone walks into the room. Interview paused at 24 minutes, 48 seconds; resumed in Interview_Bailey_part2.MOV at 0:00]

Sisay: So, do you remember the divestment protests occurring, and if so, where?

Bailey: I do. I don't remember exactly where. At least once we were in front of Marie Mount, you know, down on the steps of Marie Mount. I know at some point there was a march, but I wasn't in the march. I didn't do the march, but I did the gathering part. I don't remember where that was. And there were lots of conversations around it. So, you know, there would be rallies or small meetings where people would be talking about why we're divesting, where our holdings were, why it was important. That actually did come up in *The Eclipse* as well. I think we did an article explaining why divestment was important.

Sisay: So, what was your personal opinion about divestment and where did you sit on it?

Bailey: Well, I thought it was an important step to take. I was skeptical that large organizations, including the university—not just the university—wouldn't actually do it because it could be a potential loss. And not knowing, not being privy to those conversations at that level, was that a loss worth taking for the position that, you know, what it meant? I know that Chancellor Slaughter at the time was really good about meeting with people. I remember that. And hearing people out, hearing students out, hearing people out about why they thought it was important. That gave me hope. So, I thought divestment was a good move. I hoped that we would make that step, if from nothing else, to show that we as a university thought that it was important and were willing to take the risk it might have been to do that.

Morris: So, what was it like working as a resident assistant or an orientation advisor during contentious political events such as the divestment protests?

Bailey: It was a little tricky. By then I was an OA, not an RA by then, and it was hard because you would do the campus tours. So you got parents asking you… Well, okay, so specifically after the summer Len Bias died, that was a really rough summer because we spent the whole summer trying to not talk about it because it's in the news, it's everywhere else, and we were instructed by the director of orientation, as always, not to. If you get parents about this, direct them back to our office; you are not, as a student, to give your two cents on this; this is not a time for that. You pretty much were on lock as an OA. Just keep your mouth shut, if

possible, and direct any questions you're given to the orientation office or to the administration. It was tricky, though, because you did have opinions, you did have feelings, and like you'd be walking along and someone would just sort of pull up next to you and go, so really, though, like, are there drugs here all over the place? You know [Bailey laughs], so your first thought is, no. And if they are, they're not walking out on the corner handing them to your children. And honestly, if they want them, they're going to get them, either on this campus or off the campus or right down the street or around the corner. I had a mom ask me once—you know how on Campus Drive and Baltimore Avenue we have that big, beautiful gated? So, she was so sure that there were actually gates that slid because one of her questions was, when do the gates slide? And I was like, when do the gates slide? Like, it took me like a second, like, what is she asking? She was like, you know at the front? You know where those gates are? When do those close? [Sisay and Morris laugh] Thank you, that's what I did. Oh, I said, we don't do that. I mean there's a guard there that sometimes there in the evenings that checks people. And I said, if you look at the campus, that's literally impossible. I mean we do have a gate in the front, but if you look around the rest of the campus, there's no dome. [Sisay and Morris laugh] And so she seemed genuinely disturbed by that idea, that we didn't sort of lockdown the campus at night. And so she said, well students, people, they can just come and go? Uh-huh. And she asked me how my parents felt about me being here on a campus like that. I said, they're cool. You know you hope you gave your kids a good start in life; tell them what to and not to do; give them some good direction, and you hope they make good decisions. But, honestly, there's only so much after that you can—like you let them go and you hope they do the right thing. It was tricky because there were times when, you know, you felt like you had to defend your university. Like there were times I wasn't happy being a student here because everybody else was so sure that we were just handing them out drugs, and people not achieving, and kids failing, and no one paying attention. Like you felt like you had to kind of defend your school. Like, but wait, I'm here, and I'm doing okay. And I'm not doing drugs. And I'm passing most of my classes. You know, and there were a lot of us like, we're okay. And that was hard because when I came here, Maryland already it was an easy school to get into, everybody said. Like if I wasn't a resident, everyone was like, well state school safety. Everyone's gotta go to Maryland if you don't go anywhere else. I didn't know that at the time [Bailey laughs] when I came. And then I watched the university's reputation, its quality, its everything improve so much over the last twenty

or twenty-five years. It makes you really proud to be an alum. Even then there was some pride, even when there were some things that weren't going well. I hope I answered your questions all right.

Morris: Did you ever take part in—you already kind of touched on this, but, just to reiterate—did you take part in any of the divestment protests in addition to the gathering outside the Marie Mount building?

Bailey: I tried to. So, right, the one outside the Marie Mount. I know that I at least sat in on some of the rallies and conversations that were happening around campus where they were, you know, they were—not randomly—there would be like a gathering of people that they get. Come to this forum and hear about why the university needs to divest. So I would attend those most definitely because I wanted to know. I didn't know a lot about the issue and I wanted to understand it better, and I wanted to hear why the university would say they wouldn't do it. And they didn't say that, but there were some of these where either the chancellor or others would come and they would address the students, or whoever was there, faculty, whoever was there, talking about the university's position, and I wanted to hear that. And I wouldn't hear that if I didn't attend. So, yeah.

Sisay: So, what was the environment on campus like once the University of Maryland divested from companies in South Africa?

Bailey: I don't know. There was some relief from people that had been fighting for this. Like, yay! We did it, we listened. And then there were—I shouldn't say I know—I feel as if there were some who thought it was a big deal about nothing. Because it's one of those things you can't—it's not tangible. So, the university divests, but what does that mean for me everyday as a student? Probably nothing. Like your day-to-day life. But I know there was some relief because it felt like a victory. I know for a lot of the—especially the black students, really there was a core of students, like there always is, that really like this was what they did. I wasn't even sure if they were going to class. I know there was a sense of victory and relief for them. Just knowing that we made a case, we stayed firm, we didn't, you know, burn the place down, but we made it very clear that we need to do this. We stuck with it, and it happened, and we were listened to. And there was a lot of sort of faith put in at the time in Chancellor Slaughter. Like, okay, he's gonna listen. He's gonna listen to us.

Sisay: So, did the—you also touched on this a little earlier—but did *The Eclipse* or *The Diamondback* cover the divestment protests?

Bailey: I know both did. I don't know to the extent, but both did. I don't know if one covered it more or less than the other, but both papers did. I remember, I'm clear on that.

Sisay: Do you remember what angle they kind of went at it from?

Bailey: Well, I'm pretty positive that *The Eclipse* was like, we need to divest, period. I don't think *The Diamondback* took a position. But I honestly don't remember. I wasn't involved in reporting on divestment for *The Diamondback* at the time, so I don't know. I remember reading about it; I remember it being in the paper. I just don't remember if they took a position, or even if there was an editorial that might have addressed it. There might have been, but I don't know.

Morris: Alright, and our last question: overall, how do you think that University of Maryland has changed since your undergraduate experience?

Bailey: Whew. You all ask really big questions. [Sisay and Morris laugh] Well, the face of the university has changed. When I was here in the [19]80s, you knew almost—for example, black kids, you knew us all sort of by face. Like, you may not have known everybody's name, but when you crossed the Mall, like there was always an acknowledgement, like, hey. Because there were only so many of us here. And I felt like we didn't have the option to not at least acknowledge each other. We may not have been bosom buddies and hung out, you know, in the Union together, but there was at least an acknowledgement. And that's not the case from what I feel today. The diversity on this campus is so much greater than it was in the [19]80s, and not just in a black-and-white sense, in every sense of diversity I can think of: sexual diversity, racial diversity, background—it's just exploded. And it's made me so happy because it's not the university I went to; it's better in that respect. Don't get me wrong, there's still places to go, we still have some progress to make. But even the way the university is talking about diversity and inclusion. We didn't talk about diversity and inclusion because, first of all, [Bailey chuckles] we didn't talk about diversity and inclusion. Those weren't even words that were used at a university level. They might have been used in communities on the campus, but not at a university level. And the fact that we have training

like the Rainbow Coalition training for allies, like that didn't exist. We didn't have anything like that. First of all, you really didn't talk about the LGBT community. And now that we have an entire office and program for LGBTI studies, and an advocacy program that creates allies as part of the Rainbow training, none of that existed, and it was not even in the conversation. And now it's like a commonplace—the fact that I had a student I was working with, and she had this little card she gave me, and it was on pronouns. I have to admit, I'm just probably old and I don't have the whatever to make it happen, but like one of the nouns, it was like "X-I" or something. And I was like, wow, how do you say that, first of all? And when do I use it? Like, so if you're not a he or a she, and you're not a them or a they, you're xi. Like, when do I do that? And I told her upfront, I said, just so you know right upfront, I'm gonna get this wrong. So I'm probably just gonna call you by your name all the time so I don't mess up the pronoun. The fact that she felt comfortable enough to say to someone who she's working for, this is how I prefer to be called and referred to. And here's something that explains it for you. [Bailey chuckles] I cannot imagine that even happening in my time here as a student. Like to me, it didn't even seem to occur to her how like she—there wasn't a pause in her like, should I do this? Hi my name is Blah, and here's this, and I'm gonna make sure you understand how I prefer. It was just like you telling me what your nickname is and how you preferred to be called. Like, that just wasn't a thing. And that just, that makes me happy because there are people for whom the campus has become a more comfortable place, even though we still have other things that need to get worked on. And we still have problems talking about race on this campus, which I just don't understand. And that hurts because we think, oh my God, look how far we've come, and yet we still can't talk about race in a way—in a holistic, campus-wide kind of way. We started to touch on those conversations we had last semester, and I can't remember the name of them. There was a name for the series of them, but everybody would come; they were during lunch. And they'd have different presentations on privilege and I just can't remember what they were called.

Morris: Oh!

Bailey: You know what I'm talking about?

Morris: I know what you're talking about, but I can't remember the name.

Sisay: That's really good.

Bailey: They were really good, and they were packed every single one. It was people sitting on the floor, people lined along the walls.

Sisay: Why can't they do that?

Bailey: Well, and that's just it. It was a pilot, and they said depending on how these go—and I went to the last one, and they said, okay, it's clear we were meeting a need. These conversations need to happen again. We need to figure out how to make it happen. I don't know if there's a plan right now to make it happen, but the fact that they got the response they did. I think there were four of them, maybe? Maybe. There weren't that many, but each topic was something like, you know, when is it hate speech and when is it free speech, was one of them. That one was packed. I mean, again, and people asking questions, like, I'm gonna put it out there. I don't know the difference, and I need somebody to help me figure out the difference because I don't wanna either do this wrong, and I also want to be aware when it's happening. And having people facilitate those conversations and give hand-outs and have specific examples of resources. Again, so, I'm babbling, but again, that wouldn't have happened during my time here at Maryland. Those kinds of conversations, they just wouldn't have. They may have been really necessary, but they didn't happen. But they're happening now, and they're happening in a way that the entire campus—they're not happening in each community.

Sisay: I feel like, I don't know, it's very interesting what you said about the amount diversity has changed, like the way University of Maryland is handling diversity today; and also what you said about the black community not being as tight-knit or close or not acknowledging, I feel like that's very true about the black community right now. Also, there's just a lot of just dissatisfaction.

Bailey: There is. Yeah.

Sisay: And disappointment and anger. And I feel like the way we, I don't know, participate in activism has changed because—

Bailey: I agree.

Sisay: —there's a lot of fear, also.

Bailey: Hm.

Sisay: Like, I guess we're not willing to risk as much anymore.

Bailey: That's probably a good point, yeah.

Sisay: Yeah. And there's also just a sentiment, like in my African American public policy class we were talking about specifically the way the university is handling diversity, and that it almost seems like a cover-up? Or like they're consistently—like what you were talking about with like the forums sounded really good—but like right now it just seems like we want to seem like we're doing something—

Bailey: Mm-hm, we do.

Sisay: —not like we're actually doing something.

Bailey: Like we're actually doing it. We wanna talk about what we're doing, but we're not actually. Right. I agree.

Sisay: About all the structural issues in the university.

Bailey: I agree. So yeah, there's still work to do. We've done a lot, but we're not—but we've done it in a cosmetic way a lot of ways, and not in—

Morris: More in a PR sense, rather, than a—

Sisay: Right. But it's good—it was good to hear that we've definitely progressed in ways.

Bailey: We have.

Sisay: There's definitely a lot more resources, more access for marginalized students.

Bailey: There is. And some of the conversations are happening. But to your point they're not happening at a deep and a high enough level, maybe.

Inconsistently. And even after Lieutenant Collins' death, I felt like that was such an opportunity! Right now, guys!

Sisay: I felt like it was handled badly.

Bailey: It was. I feel like they…

Sisay: I'm kind of just like, I don't really understand. I don't know. There's a lot that goes into it. Like with President Loh, and I don't know. I don't know what his beliefs are. Like—

Bailey: I don't either. I don't either. And to me that's part of the problem.

Sisay: The way he handled it. I feel like it's him—

Bailey: Right.

Sisay: —and his lack of understanding, lack of trying to educate himself or…

Bailey: Or, and, to your point, it could also be that takes vulnerability and courage, and it takes saying; it takes admitting—

Sisay: That we're wrong.

Bailey: —we're wrong. If your job is main PR officer, which is basically what you are as a president, the last thing you're gonna probably say is, we did this wrong.

Sisay: Yeah.

Bailey: Yeah, because you're right, that would be really helpful if we could hear right now, you know what, we didn't handle that well.

Sisay: Yeah, let's try to advocate.

Bailey: So we have like a task force now, which is lovely, but that's one of those slow-moving, background—

Sisay: What are they? They did email us about—it was a diversity task force?

Bailey: And there's a long name for it. But basically, right. So they've been holding forums but I've heard they're not well-attended.

Sisay: So, when they had these forums last semester, what were the topics and how were they structured? Like, was it from an oppression standpoint? Like, that's what I'm kind of wondering. Like, how did they go about handling conversations of race and gender and sexuality?

Bailey: The only one I went to, which was just like a town hall. It wasn't—

Sisay: Was it educational, like history and background?

Bailey: No, it wasn't. [Bailey laughs]

Sisay: I feel like that's really important.

Bailey: Yeah, I agree.

Sisay: Like teaching the students this is the history of racism of UMD and—

Bailey: That would be a great idea. Well, and you can make suggestions. They said in the one I was in, we want to hear your suggestions for what we could do. Here's our email, here's whatever the address is. I wanna say it's on the president's website, but there's a way you can make suggestions. I don't know what's gonna happen to the suggestions, but I like the suggestion because education is really important, especially considering context.

Sisay: Yeah, I feel like education is what needs to happen. We can't have conversations that just lack context and lack understanding. That's what I would like to see happen.

Bailey: I agree. I think a lot of people would like to see it happen. I don't think you're alone. It's just getting it to happen. I have to say though, this president is—

Sisay: He's a lot.

Bailey: Our last president was even more tone deaf. President Loh, God love him, had a lot of great ideas, moved the university along in amazing ways. But

these conversations wouldn't have happened under his [the preceding president's] administration. And not because he didn't want them to. I don't think that he thought like, why would we do that? You know, at least Loh will give it lip-service and allow it to happen and give it—he may not follow up [Bailey chuckles], but under Mote we wouldn't have even had them. It wouldn't have happened, necessarily, or he wouldn't have understood why. So again, progress: slow, but it happens. I think that's the hard part is the knowing it's changing, but is it changing in significant enough ways? And is moving at a pace that's—acceptable is the wrong word, but like a lot of history it doesn't happen overnight. And so the fact that I've been out of school for thirty years and I can say it's better, but look how long ago that was; the kid I had in school is now a thirty year old man. So, that's a long time. [Bailey laughs] It's not a little amount of time.

Morris: All right, we're gonna end the interview there.

[End of Interview]

Transcribed by:
Audit-edited by: Shelly Justement, June 25, 2022
Final edited by: