Q. Hello, I am Nic Flores. Today is February 18, 2014, and I am interviewing Dr. Christine Ballengee Morris, whose birthdate is February 15, 1955. Dr. Ballengee Morris, could you please describe the positions you’ve held, the roles you’ve played here at Ohio State, perhaps what units and what time period?

A. Sure. And it’s Ballengee. Part of our family actually separated during one of the historical wars, and some of them became Ballenger and some of them remained Ballengee. So I’ve grown up with that a lot of my life. I came here to Ohio State University in 1995. I had just graduated from Penn State University. I had accepted a position at the Newark campus and my role was to teach Art, Art Education, and be the curator of the gallery that is there in the Lefevre Building. And at the time my husband and I worked as artists-in-residence. We had been doing that for a long time. My husband is an Appalachian folk singer and I do flat foot dancing, which is a combination of Celtic, African and Native-American dance steps. I grew up with that particular style of dance. We would do school residencies in working with students. We called our program “Telling Our Story,” and it became part of my research agenda that was attached actually to my dissertation. So when we came to Ohio, we had done residences in Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky, very strong in West Virginia and North Carolina. They – some of the faculty members in my department – introduced my husband to the Ohio Arts Council, and they hired him to be a visiting artist here in the State of Ohio. One of the schools was Fort Hayes [Metropolitan Education Center in Columbus]. We worked with the students. They were
putting on an Appalachian play, and I decided to complement that by putting on an Appalachian exhibition at the gallery in Newark. I had six performing artists come in, and the first year I was here at Newark, I didn’t do the gallery. A graduate student did. They gave me a year to kind of get my footing. And so that was my open to the community. Fort Hayes brought a bus load of students, high school students, and we had that particular, it was a Black Box theatre, packed. It was absolutely packed. And it was a really good way of beginning to introduce yourself to the community.

It was important to me because I wanted the gallery to be culturally driven and community-based. That was very, very important to me. So I developed – because of the people who came – I developed a community advisory committee that would help drive that exhibition. I also had a graduate student who wrote their dissertation about that, wrote her master’s thesis, and later would put elements of that within her dissertation. During the time that I was there – I changed to the Columbus campus in 2000, I think it was – we had had exhibitions like car art, which included all these cars that people fixed up and they rode them around. When I asked my dean if it would be okay, he stated that he was thinking there would be, like, ten cars. He didn’t expect 200 cars that were parked all over in the grass, and he was a little shocked over that. But we had a packed house. I actually got a car dealership to donate a car that was running, but one that they could let go, and we hired a car artist who is from Columbus, Ramona [Moon], and she’s in a really great documentary about car art, and she was our artist, and we decorated that car and raffled it off, so that people bought tickets for $1 for a chance to have a car. So we did that. We did a Brazil exhibition – it was about feather art – and we had Dr. Mark Plotkin, who is a medical doctor who works a lot with indigenous tribes in the Amazon
region, looking at the medicines that they retrieve from herbs and trees and so on. He was, at that time, considered one of Time magazine’s promising people in the new coming century. He came and Dr. Christina Rizzi, who was the curator for the University of San Paulo’s indigenous museum came. So we really developed a great series of bringing people in, and creating a community of of the art gallery. And it was great. One of the things that came out of that, that is still a little bit in evidence of all of that that occurred then, was that we had money that was donated and art was bought. We created a tour of the University through the art and put brochures out and people could see the campus through the art. So that was pretty fun. And I really liked working there.

During the last year I had Charlene Teters, who was known for a documentary called, “In Whose Honor.” She was a graduate student at University of Illinois. They have a native person, Chief Illiniwek, as the schools’ sports mascot. Charlene is a Lakota. And she took her sons to a basketball game and was absolutely embarrassed to see that sports mascot and to see what they did. She felt a need to make a statement, so she held up a sign and stood by the road, and little by little, her notion to stop American-Indian mascots grew and it grew and it grew. It took many years for the University of Illinois to listen. But it happened. But the documentary occurred, and her art changed a lot during that time period. She’s actually a professor at the IA School [Institute of American Indian Arts] in Sante Fe. But we had the opportunity of having her at OSU. And some of the last exhibits that I’ve really been a part of helping to curate, has concentrated on the Earthworks in Ohio – becoming involved with that has really, really changed and altered my life, and has altered my experiences here at OSU.
Q. So you’ve talked about your curating, about your teaching. Have you held any other positions at the University?

A. I have. In 2000, what made my change from Newark to Columbus was that I accepted a position as Founding Director of the Multicultural Center. That was something that Dr. [William] Kirwan, who was the President [of OSU], he really wanted to see this happen. It was built on the idea that I would be academic as well as being connected to Student Affairs, as it was called then, Student Life as it is called now. The hope was that it would help change how diversity would be defined, represented and supported for and by students, faculty and community. I was there through 2005. I had always said that I probably wouldn’t stay more than five years because I believe that if you stay any longer than that, then the new department or the new Multicultural Center, would end up being more about me than about the University, and that it needed to constantly change. I felt it had to be always in process and represent the students. We developed a lot of workshop-like classes that was just a one-time hit – 45 minutes – but based about race or gender, or sexual orientation for the First Year Success Program. We wanted the freshmen to be introduced to these ideas and to also know that we existed. That was a way of advertising us as well. I also supervised graduate students as they were pursuing degrees in higher education because they are the ones that will end up working in residence halls or in particular departments that serve students. So that was always a great fit. We developed new programs, such as the Diversity Leadership Transcript Program. I don’t think it still exists today, but it was a way for students to take courses or workshops and get credit for it and have it placed on their transcript that they had done that. There had been lots of resistance from administration to actually have that on the transcript. And then there was
the Bank One Leadership Development program. Of course, Bank One no longer exists; it’s Chase. It was monies that they gave to help create that. And we also created “What is a Story?” program. It’s changed, the title is “What’s In a Story?” now, but it was mainly to honor storytelling, and students would learn about narratives, students could learn the lessons of life from people. And this was important to document. With that, if a faculty person had written a book we would buy [copies of the faculty member’s book] and give them out free to the first 10-15-20 students that would come through the door, and they would walk away with that free book. During that time, I also co-wrote a proposal to start an American-Indian studies and a minor. [English Prof.] Chad Allen and [History Prof.] Lucy Murphy were the other two people. It took us a long time to get that through the hoops, and I served as the first coordinator. I’m back being the coordinator again. So within that position holds a lot of history and a lot of stories. It was in 2005 that I went back to being professor in charge of a course that deals with multicultural issues or areas of subject. I’m very happy to be in that space.

Q. So you talked about storytelling and narratives. Would you be able to talk about your family and background and experiences that helped shape you prior to coming to Ohio State University?

A. What’s my narrative? Okay. My narrative. I am Appalachian and American Indian, specifically Eastern Band Cherokee, which means the reservation is located in North Carolina and is also part of the ancestral lands. I grew up knowing that I was different, but at the same time, that if I was not around my family, I didn’t look different at all. So I really understood the power of representation and what it meant to be a minority in plain sight. In the north too, the accent tends to give you away as well, so it’s not always about
the color of one’s skin. So I grew up knowing that. And that I would be different when I lived somewhere in North Carolina but not that very much. And I wasn’t very different when I lived in West Virginia because of the Appalachian side. But when I came to Ohio I was different, no matter what. And we were poor. I didn’t understand how poor we were until other people pointed it out, and it really didn’t hit me that much until I was in high school, when I really realized what everybody else had. They bought clothes in stores and I didn’t get to buy clothes in stores. My grandmother, my aunt, my mom, made my clothes. But that was just how I grew up. We grew and canned, hunted or caught our food. So we ate very well. We ate very fresh food. When I look back I understand that we ate local and organic. I know no other way. Grocery stores were fun to go to because we didn’t go as often. I couldn’t believe all that stuff was available and you could just pick it up and pay for it. It was an oddity for me.

My parents wanted me to go to school; they felt education was very important. My one grandmother felt that there was a great deal of power in degrees. She didn’t have one. She was deaf and had lost her hearing when she was in seventh grade, I think. Seventh or eighth grade. She could read lips and she was a smart woman, but her education level had stopped at that point. And so they really pushed me to go beyond high school. But at the time the high school counselor said that I wasn’t really college material. That shook me a bit. I didn’t know what to think about it. But I had another teacher who had a great deal of faith in me and helped me do the applications, and I actually got offered a scholarship to Harvard. But my parents said that that was really too far away and didn’t encourage me to go in that direction, and I really didn’t understand the value of that. I understood the value of going to school free, but I didn’t understand
about the value of that name. So I took another scholarship at a community college and went there. And I worked at the public health department doing transcriptions and took business classes that I really wasn’t interested in taking, but I was told that that would be a good thing for me, that I would always be employed. For some reason that seemed to be very important; I needed to have a job, and so I did that. I liked doing the little workbooks, so I got a degree in accounting. Didn’t like accounting but I liked doing the little workbooks. So I got a couple of jobs and was successful.

At some point, though, I really, really thought that I should be happy and I didn’t know exactly how that might come about, so I decided to quit my job because I didn’t like it very well and go back to school. And I was afraid to be a risk taker, so I went and applied and was accepted at Miami University for a business degree, because I had the accounting degree. I decided to do arts management under their business degree, so I was able to take a couple of art classes. And what a relief it was because I was taking, I don’t remember, I was taking a math, microbiology, drawing and an art education class. And I looked forward to the art class and the art education class, and I was suffering with microbiology. I ended up passing that one, but the calculus was just hard, because I had never had algebra and geometry. That was why I wasn’t college material because I hadn’t taken those classes. No one explained to me in high school that I needed to go down that road, if that was what I was interested in doing. So one of the professors talked to me about my career choices and why was I in the business program, why was that my major when I had a two-year degree? Why didn’t I do something like an art education or an art degree? That way I would be balanced and it would allow myself to be more open for other positions. Well, again, it was that whole job thing, so I thought that sounded pretty
good. And I said, “Do I have to take the calculus?” And he said, “No.” Well there you go. I went straight to the office and changed my degree, dropped that calculus class, added another class, and I was happy to go. My parents could not believe that I did that, and what they said was, “You do realize that you quit a job that will probably be the highest paid job you will ever work? And you will probably be unemployed.” I said, “Yes, but I’ll be happy.” My dad thought about it for a minute and he said, “You know happiness, that’s a pretty good point. Okay, as long as you’re happy, we’ll go with that.”

So that’s what I did. I worked through getting my degree, and I was never unemployed. I worked in museums and worked in schools. I went back to live in North Carolina and taught school there. And one of the things that I learned, I had lived outside of my ancestral land for most of my life but we actually moved to the middle of North Carolina. It was really the first dose of strong racism that I had experienced, and it wasn’t towards me. It was really toward whoever else was not white. There’s a small little town where the school was located and we lived near, and they had a homemade sign by the town sign that said, “Home of the KKK.” The men dressed up on Halloween and gave out candy in their KKK outfits. There’s children of color having to be a part of that. And I made a comment about that and it ended up in the newspaper and with my name. We ended up with a visit at night. They came to our home and they slashed the screen and poured a can of beer on us. They could see us because I had the curtains open. At that time I never thought about closing curtains. And my husband is a Vietnam veteran who sleeps with a gun by the bed. And so he got the gun and shot some shots. They had slit my tires. The police came but they didn’t catch the guys. They could see where they had been, and then we found out that my tires were slit. But it gave me a real understanding
of the power, and I know that’s naïve, but the power of words, particularly in relationship to the place. We moved into a closed community, to feel maybe a little bit more safe. We stayed there for, I don’t know, two or three more years. I was really over it. I was tired of that, and I didn’t want my children to be exposed to this; they had already been exposed to so much. I was wanting them to have better experiences. So that was part of my motivation actually to leave and to go back to school and find a journey different than the journey I was on.

Q. And how would you say, how do you self-identify? Some of that came out just a second ago. But self-identification. But in what ways has that shaped you? Maybe particularly gender in your narrative?

A. Being American Indian and being Appalachian, a woman in my tribal affiliation, it’s driven by women. And in Appalachia I was surrounded by strong women. So it was quite natural to have opinions and to grow up with understanding that that is okay. It was more challenging to find out that the rest of the world didn’t think that way. So that was, for me, that was coming to terms, I think, of being female. It’s funny, when you asked that question, I think, if you don’t mind, when I was four years old, I was in love with Roy Rogers. He was a cowboy on television. He had his own love of his own life. It was not me. It was Dale Evans. I wanted it to be me, I fantasized to be Dale Evans and actually cried and cried and cried to my mom that I wanted this Dale Evans outfit. And then I thought Roy Rogers would marry me, if I had the official Dale Evans outfit. Then, also, my cousins would let me be a cowgirl because when we would play cowboys and Indians; they’d make me always be the Indian because they said I was. To be an Indian meant I died first, which meant I laid on the ground and I didn’t find that very enticing to
just lay on the ground while they got to run and shoot guns and make lots of noises. So I thought I would have this cowgirl thing. I have a photograph of me in my Dale Evans outfit. You have no idea how proud I was of that. I went out and they looked at me and said, “You’re still an Indian. Just because you have a cowgirl outfit on doesn’t change the fact that you’re an Indian.” Now that’s saying it in a sophisticated way. They were not as sophisticated as that. But that was what they were meaning. I remember going in and crying and telling my mom that the outfit didn’t work, and I remember my dad trying to really talk to me about things that were really a little bit more sophisticated than what I could handle at that time. But that’s what drove the idea that I was different. So I went from that idea of being in love with Roy Rogers, and finding out years later Roy Rogers is Appalachian and Cherokee, from the southern part of Ohio. So I did not know that he was the same as me at the time. So that was kind of nice to know.

We were poor, people gave me tap shoes, and for some reason I thought, just like the outfit, if you have tap shoes you’re a dancer. So I’d put them on and I took them to school and I did a tap demonstration. I’d never taken tap dance. But I was in first grade then. But I felt because I had the shoes I was a tapper. Did the same thing with the piano. Someone had a piano and I sat down and I played it and they asked me what that was. I said, “Oh, you’re not familiar with that tune,” but I had never played the piano. So I was constantly making these roles for myself as a young girl trying to figure those things out. I was going to be an Olympic skier. I built a ski ramp from my slide, put snow all over it, except for I’d never been on skis. Didn’t know you had to have skis. I hadn’t paid attention to that on the Olympics. Kind of kept going in that direction, reading books. Reading books was my way of escaping the world that was around me. I was encouraged
to be a nurse because that was the job we were supposed to be interested in, either a nurse or a teacher. And so I thought I was going to grow up to be a nurse and be a mommy. And then the '70s came around and I wanted to be an artist, never wanting children then at that point. And then becoming a mother and trying to figure all that out as well, because I had not really thought I was going to be that. And coming across the fact that when I did become a mother, that it was the idea at the time that you were either a feminist or a mother. The idea that you could be both was not in my thinking or ability to comprehend. If I stayed home with my children, then my choice was to stay stupid, I thought. So it was really interesting, constantly trying to battle the idea of what it is to be a woman and how could I meet the expectations and yet meet my expectations at the same time. So interesting, always negotiating.

Q. That shaped your experience at Ohio State, would you say?

A. Oh absolutely, absolutely.

Q. How?

A. Well, because in, God I can’t believe I’m going to say this, but in the early days of being here, in my department it’s mainly women and at the time there was only one other woman that had children. So the culture wasn’t there to support the idea of what you might need as a woman, a researcher, and a mother. No one ever asked that. The expectation is that you would have to do research, international travel, domestic travel, and at the same time I had two children. Yes, I was married, but my husband is 100 percent disabled and needed, still needs, care. And at the time I was the sole provider. So it was hard with no support, none whatsoever, to manage that. And I also needed to keep the job. So I needed tenure. So what do you do? Well, I gave up on my family. That’s
what I had to do. I wasn’t there for my kids like I would have liked to be. And you can justify and say, “Well, they were older, they were in seventh grade.” Well, seventh grade, they need you. They’re running into some really mighty trouble if you don’t hold onto them tight. So I missed things that I regret. And I’m not sure why. So I had sons that would say, “Gee, we need to become your student. Maybe you might pay attention to us,” or “Gee, can we make an appointment with you?” When they were going to Ohio State, that’s what they would say. So I saw them more when they were students here at Ohio State than I did living in the home. That’s probably not where you wanted me to go with that, but that was a real hard lesson for me that really shaped probably who I am today and some of the things that I support at Ohio State today would be that.

One of the things I did as Director of the Multicultural Center, and of course today you see them everywhere, is that we developed a nursing room, so that women around the campus could come with their baby, in a nice place, not in a bathroom, but in a nice place with a couch and no overhead lighting, private, and a door, so they could nurse their baby. I couldn’t believe how popular that became. One day I had to give up my office because we had more nursing babies than rooms. I said, “Okay, you can come in my office. I’ll leave.” The daddy and the mommy and the baby were there. How wonderful that is, that they’re together, and you can support that. I also felt it was okay as long as the subject matter and as long as they controlled the kids, that if they needed to, come to class with your kid. Let’s not stop the process. As long as things can go on as usual, and I wasn’t talking about things that would be bad for the kid to hear or see, I encouraged them to do so. But a lot of that was based on my own personal experiences at the time, of not having that support.
Q. Taking some of this under account and considering your various identities that you’ve shared, what was the climate for you in your department and maybe at the University at large with your time here? Did you have any mentors?

A. I do. I did. I have mentors. I had a strong mentor when I was first hired, Patricia Stuhr. Oh my goodness, she’s a fellow Native person, who introduced me to people, helped me understand and protected me, when I needed to be protected. She was one that understood about the family situation, although she didn’t have children herself. But she was the one who understood and tried to help me learn how to adjust. Vesta Daniel, who was also in my department, and the other one who had children. Her children were the same age as mine. We sort of, in a way, helped support each other in that process as we were going. We taught together. We did research together, and it helped, it really helped. We did research with Pat, who ended up being our chair years later. I’ve been lucky to have them, and today I have Shannon Gonzalez-Miller and Marti Chatsmith, both Native women, who have been strong Native women that help me on, really on a weekly basis. And then I have someone that we’ve decided [be] a co-mentor. She’s younger. She’s an associate professor. But I really value her leadership skills. So we’ve developed a process that we mentor each other. We see each other outside of the work and that’s where that stays. That stays outside of work. Then we come into work and we don’t want to mix the two together.

But here at this University – one of the things I wanted to talk about when you asked about the women, about being female, one of the things that I’ve learned, a couple of things that I’ve learned, and unfortunately, I think some of it still goes on. I had a dean when I was at Newark who told me, during our annual review, I wasn’t going to get an
equity raise because a white male was going to get the equity raise because he had a family that depended on him. And it took a little bit of air out of my lungs. I said, “I’m the sole provider of my family, too, and I have two sons and a husband as well. So how do you compare this? Why would you tell me that? What was the purpose of telling me any of that? We could have gone on without me knowing this, because I didn’t know I was even up for an equity raise.” And he said, “Well, I just thought if you thought you were going to get it, because you were an Indian or a minority, I just wanted you to know that you’re not because he has these needs.” I told one of my mentors about it and she said, “You do know that that’s not right? You do know that there’s so many policies right this minute that were crossed, that you should go and tell.” And I said, “Well, who do I go and tell?” And they told me, “Go to Human Resources.” Well I did, because I’m in a small campus. The idea that I was over there was pretty well translated two doors down to the person that said all this stuff. So he became quickly aware that I had done that, which I meant I had paperwork I had to do. Things kind of got placed in a really bad space. And I felt very vulnerable at that point, which was part of my motivation to transfer to the Columbus campus. I couldn’t see myself being able to thrive under that leadership.

What I didn’t understand was that he wasn’t going to be the leader for very long. And so if I had stayed another three months my history would have been different. Under his leadership President Gee was the President the first time around and he was coming to the campus to visit and I was on the Executive Committee, the only female on the Executive Committee. I was chair of diversity. So they (deans) assigned me to sit in the middle so that I could be right next to the head dean and President Gee. No one else had a
sitting position but [me] for the lunch; they wanted the idea, the memory of that a female was sitting on that Executive Committee. So those are kind of funny stories, I think. It probably doesn’t make sense but it was what they did.

Q. Do you have any other stories of equity issues that came up?

A. Just the fact of remaining probably, I still see that, at least in our department, and maybe in our college, that we tend to be lower pay and we’re still saying the same story. That’s a shame – I don’t understand that, can’t understand why that’s true. You see it in the Chronicle all the time; it’s not just at Ohio State. It’s the academic institution. I don’t understand that. The other thing that I’ve experienced, and it still goes on, and not just in a personal way, but I’ve seen it happen to other women. It doesn’t matter, I’ve sat on the University Executive Committee or department, not as much with our department committee, but on college committees. I say something, as a female I say something, and it’s as if I didn’t say anything, which is okay. Not every comment needs to be acknowledged. Say five, ten minutes later, a man says the same thing and he gets a response. First time you think maybe they didn’t hear you. Second time, you think why aren’t they hearing me. The fourth time, you get a little upset. Then I get to the place where I just tune out. I don’t pay attention. I don’t become part of the conversation. And that’s dangerous because we have something important to say. But if no one is going to listen to what you have to say, then why bother? How do you get through that? I’ve also noticed that in taking this same situation, where there’s men that are sensitive to that, and they go, “Oh, Christine said something. Say it again.” I’m glad that they acknowledge. I’m glad that they heard me. And yet when we had a woman President [Karen Holbrook], some of the behind closed-door conversations went where they should not have gone.
Why should we care what color of suit [she wears]? Do we talk about that with the men? Or the hair or the kind of purse. It’s the same kind of stuff they talk about with Hillary Clinton. But it’s done here at this level, where you are exposed to it, and it affects you. It affects me, it makes me angry, sometimes I have to take a little bit of a vacation from some of that, tune it out, before I could come back. And yet if I responded to it in a way that I have before, where I explode, that isn’t a learning experience either, because no one learns when you yell or when you try to make your voice forceful. No one hears you.

Q. No, no, no. Perhaps, could you talk about your most powerful, or some of your most powerful experiences here at Ohio State?

A. One of the things that I think that’s been powerful and long-lasting for me, was getting involved with the Earthworks. I grew up with Earthworks. There’s an Earthwork on the Qualla Reservation that is referred to as the Mother mound, which is not an uncommon term used by Native people, that have Earthworks and mounds in their culture, still have Earthworks in their culture. And no matter where I moved, there were Earthworks. So when I moved to Newark, the fact that there were Earthworks in my backyard, the fact that I lived right by the Great Circle, right up from the Octagon Mound, it was just kind of like, “Okay, there you go.” I found out that it said in the phone book, back in the days when there were phone books, that it was a space that was owned by the Ohio Historical Society and visitation information was given. So I took a class there. I didn’t understand I could only visit one little spot where there’s a lookout stand that you climb up and overlook. So golf balls were thrown at us. And that’s an educational moment. When that happens you can start talking about colonialism and the ownership of land, and intentions of how it’s being used versus what it was meant to be used. I made some comments to
some colleagues of mine about that happening. I don’t remember, it was like a couple of weeks or a month later, I received a phone call stating that there was a group that was getting together for lunch to talk about the Octagon Mound. And they thought I would be interested in that conversation. It ended up being a strong group that had big ideas, and it was exciting, very exciting to me. We decided that we would have a town meeting about it. We had an auditorium of people that were very interested about the Octagon Mound and some of the things that were stated were happening.

The Country Club that has their clubhouse and golf course on the Octagon Mound wanted to expand their building, which meant that they were going to be building more into the Octagon Mound. The Octagon Mound is the only earthen lunar calendar in the world. The only one. It’s one of the three ancient wonders of the world located in the United States and the other two are in a federal part and is a state park. And ours is on a private country club, owned by the Ohio Historical Society. My goodness, talk about multiple lens and perspectives and topics that were all embedded just in that. Two wealthy families were a part of the country club were also donors to the University. And unbeknownst to me one of them had made a phone call to our dean and said, I was the junior faculty, and they wanted to make a deal. The deal would be, I would be fired. They didn’t want me to have tenure because I was being viewed as a trouble maker. The tenure process was explained to them, that was not how that was going to happen and the process was explained. Anyway, the point of this is, that through that process we developed an ad hoc group called, “The Friends of the Mounds,” and we continued, we got a grant. We hired a resource management group that came in and helped us create a cultural resource management plan that was given to the Ohio Historical Society, because
they are the owners. It introduced me to the Ohio Historical Society and to a lot of other people in the State of Ohio. Then it introduced me to a lot of people in the United States who cared about Earthworks, and then suddenly I started visiting Earthworks from around the world. And having a larger understanding of all of these things, but barely an understanding of any of it. It just continues to grow.

From The Friends of the Mounds a proposal was written and accepted and the Board of Trustees here at Ohio State accepted the idea of having the Newark Earthworks Center, and being a part of that. And then through that we’ve had several grants, one with the University of Cincinnati, which was built the Ancient Ohio Trail, which is a DVD as well as a web site for information, for tourism, for education, and it provides interviews. I was interviewed. And we are in the second or third phase of that – a new grant that has been put to the National Endowment for the Humanities, to build another type of web site, as well as for me. I received a National Endowment of Humanities grant to create a game about the Octagon Mound, because of it being a lunar calendar. What does that mean? What is meant about the rotation? Why is that different than other types of calendars, and how that relates to Native people, and how their calendars are different than the calendars that we use in popular culture. And then I got a HASTAC [Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory] grant, which meant that I created a children’s informal, we created a children’s informal web site, with learning. The HASTAC is supported by the McArthur Foundation, and Bill and Linda Gates. So it’s turned me completely inside out. My research was about Colonialism, but now it’s pretty heavily into Earthworks. I’m learning every day about Earthworks and I appreciate that learning. And all the different people that I’ve been able to meet. That, I
have to say, is one of the big highlights of being here at Ohio State. And the other is being involved with the Ohio State Medical Center, because of my congenital heart disease, and being able to work as a Mended Hearts [volunteer]. Working with doctors and nurses and being a certified visitor, and understanding myself through other people. And when I just feel really sorry for myself, there’s nothing better than to go to the hospital and make a hospital visit and understand that all is within one’s perspective. So that for me is the other highlight, i working with so many great people in that area as well. And learning.

Q. Wonderful, thank you for sharing.

A. You’re welcome.

Q. So you’ve mentioned several efforts that you’ve been a part of in kind of effecting institutional change around issues of equality. But I’m curious if there are any others that maybe you haven’t touched on. Or maybe would like to talk about.

A. Stories about?

Q. You were involved with and affecting institutional change on issues of equality. You’ve mentioned the Multicultural Center. You discussed some of your involvement with your department. Described your experience with Earthworks. But are there others that you would like to share?

A. One of the things just recently, don’t know yet if it’s been approved, and this may not be anything that you ask me about but I’ll say it anyway. I saw the President sent out just recently, I think it was in December, he sent out the new tobacco policy law. And they had written an exception in it for Native people because tobacco is a spiritual herb used in some ceremonies. And yet reading that exception, the exception, the language was not
quite the same language that’s used in Ohio State or the State of Ohio’s language, mainly because they used federal language. And the State of Ohio does not have a federally recognized tribe because they managed to move them all away. So the way that one is identified here in the State of Ohio is by self-identification, except for in this policy it was about being from a federally recognized tribe. I’m federally recognized, but you don’t have a federally recognized tribe in the State of Ohio, but you can be federally recognized. But we use the self-identification. The reason why that was bothersome was that they wrote it so that only those from a federally recognized tribe would be able to use the tobacco and that you would have to go through, I think it was two people, to get permission. Well that’s pretty cumbersome. We had already experienced just recently when a graduate student had passed away, we had a service, a memorial service, and we had offered what’s called tobacco ties. Those are little bags that have a little bit of tobacco in it as a gift. And it’s a gift of memory. It’s a gift of love. It’s a sign of respect. Tribes that have tobacco ties have different ways of giving, but here at Ohio State we’ve had to be pan-Native, so we were pan-Native. So we didn’t hand them out; we just stated that, “Here’s a basket if you would like to take a tobacco tie. It’s available.” We were questioned about that by someone higher up, that we had tobacco on the property. I’m sure there are a lot of people that have tobacco on the property. It’s called a pack of cigarettes in their purse or shirt pocket.

Q. Thank you, thank you for sharing. In your opinion and at this time, what remains undone relative to the progress of women and other diverse groups?

A. There’s a lot more. I think the pay issue is a problem. I see younger girls, younger women, I shouldn’t call them girls, but younger women, and I don’t know how to word
this and I don’t know quite how to think about it, so I’ll try. They don’t seem, and I’m so generalizing, but the ones that I’ve had in my classes feel that equity has been achieved, they’re there, and this is ridiculous even to talk about. Because I’ll ask that in the courses that I teach. I will ask that. And to them it’s done. It’s a done deal. And I try to point out that, well if that is true why women still the poorest gender, not even at this work place, but why are they on that level? Why in our society women are still struggling trying to be the mother and trying to do all these different roles. Haven’t we come to a better place? What could we do to create a better place? And they reject the fact that there’s a need for that. And I don’t know what we did to make the young women think that it’s done. It’s been achieved. Or, am I so old that I don’t see that it’s done? Am I living within a historical, hysterical impact that I can’t recognize that we’re there? I don’t believe we are. I can’t because when I read some of the things that I read and see some of the things that I see, and read the statistics that we have, it confuses me. It confuses me because we have that type of information and yet we have this reaction. I know I’m not telling them that the fight is over and that we’re there and that we’ve achieved all of it. We don’t need to be concerned. But yet I feel like I’m being a bit of a negative influence in their life by saying, “At what point did you think it was over? At what point did you think we made it? Are you getting all the opportunities?” Little by little by asking those questions in small gender-specific groups, you begin to hear some stories. But they’re really still hiding those stories. They’re not telling those stores in the big picture, where young men are hearing some of this. To them it’s done, because that’s what they’re hearing. That’s what they’re being told. It’s interesting, because it’s polarized in some ways. It’s hidden.
It’s right in plain sight. And it’s not my story to reveal in some ways but it’s a story that I do want them to consider revealing. But I don’t know when they will.

So I guess for me what needs to be done is to continue to plant those seeds. I would like to see administration taking a bigger, better and bolder steps in supporting women. We all should be paid good money for what we do and recognized for the good job that we do. Young women should have the opportunities as young men should have the opportunities to be whatever it is that they want to be. And it shouldn’t even have to be a discussion. That sometimes is my frustration. But what are you doing to do? You can’t stop. That’s what I was asking when you asked me that question. It’s like, “Oh my gosh, there’s so much left to do.” Supporting the young professors with children. They understand and demand more nowadays. And I, gosh, I don’t want to say envious because I was taught that that was not a good way of feeling, but I respect the fact that they are strong and they know what they should have. And they get it. I wish I had had that, too. So I’m glad and I support it. But more of it should be out there. Still, I hear the horror stories of not being supported or the babysitter, the kid is sick and people wonder, “Well where is your babysitter?” As if maybe you might want to stay home with a sick kid. What’s going to happen? The University is going to close down for the day. No, it’s not. Not going to happen. What was the purpose of making her feel that way? But at the same time, what wonderful growth we have, that we have paternity benefits and so men can be able to experience the same thing if they desire to. How wonderful. So I know that there is so much growth and yet there’s so much more we can do.

Q. No, thank you for sharing, Dr. Ballengee Morris. Are there any other topics that you want to talk about that we didn’t cover?
A. I’m trying to think. We talked a lot about being a woman, about being American Indian, being Appalachian, somewhat about being a teacher. My regrets of being torn between being a mother and having a career, and yet I’ve two wonderful sons, both alumni from Ohio State University. One is a major in the Army. He got his degree in Spanish and History here and went on to get a Master’s in History and another one in, I call it Spy University, but he has a degree, a Master’s in Intelligence. He’s now a father, which makes me a grandmother and at this time it is probably one of my most loving roles that I have, because unlike my mother situation when I was a mother and trying to balance, I’m in a position in my career here that I’m now full professor and if my grandson needs something, I take the time to give it. And he’s the future, not only the future, but he wants to come to Ohio State and even thinks it’s exciting to see an Ohio State University garbage can. He just thinks that’s the coolest thing in the whole wide world. Julian saw all of them and named each and every one. He’s seven. And so I’ve tried to learn about time management and balance and be able to give to him and invest in him. I want him to be proud of me as much as I am so fortunate to have him in my life. My other son, he’s the artist and I treasure all that we can make and create. That’s all, I think, the rest I would say, is that part of my role, as being the mother and the grandmother. Thank you so very much for asking all these questions and giving me the opportunity to talk about myself.

Q. Thank you, Dr. Ballengee Morris. You do have memorabilia?

A. I do.

Q. Are there any other people that you can think of that we might interview for this project?
A. I thought of one, I think she was on the list, and I don’t remember if they still have to be here. Do they still have to be at the University?

Q. I don’t believe so but I’m not sure.

A. Okay. Because I think Rebecca Nelson, I would really love for her to interviewed. She worked for the Office of Minority Affairs when they were Office of Minority Affairs, she worked with the hospital and she was the Associate Director of the Multicultural Center and then became the Director of the Multicultural Center. So she was here for 19 or 20 years. She just recently left for a job, a nice position, with the City of Columbus, still in the health care area. So she’s still local but she has a lot of stories that would be revealing. She was very much a part of supporting the Asian-American communities in Ohio and some of the Asian-American student organizations. As a matter of fact, my dentist knew Rebecca and met his wife in one of the events that Rebecca in her position with the OMA [Office of Minority Affairs] developed. So I hear those stories a lot and know him from that perspective. And actually Rebecca was one who brought in my oldest son. They at the time had a scholarships for American-Indian students and my son received one of them and became somewhat involved with the American-Indian student organization, which is how then I met Marti Chatsmith who is one of my – we are co-mentors together. So it’s a small world and 20 years later we’re still there together, so what does that say? And we’ve changed roles from all over the place, but it’s nice to have that type of history. But I would say Rebecca. I know Marty Chatsmith is on the list of being interviewed. I think that Dr. [Deborah] Ballam had assigned someone to interview her. So she would have been another one that I would have suggested as well.

Q. Would you be willing to interview for this project?
A. Sure. Absolutely.

Q. Well, thank you. Those are all the questions that we have.

A. Okey dokey.

Q. I appreciate you and your time. Thank you for you allowing me to witness.

A. You’re welcome. Thank you.