

Cindy Schuster Interview

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SPEAKERS

Interviewer: Courtney Trang

Interviewee: Cindy Schuster

Courtney Trang

Okay, so we start off with a little statement. This is Courtney Trang. It's October 25, 2023, at 2:31pm. I'm with Cindy Schuster via the online team platform. And we're going to begin our oral history interview for the University of Baltimore stories, the 100th anniversary oral history project. The purpose of this project is to celebrate the University's Centennial, by preserving the memory of those influenced by the University of Baltimore over the years, we will be creating a digital archive and exhibit and making these recordings available online. Okay, Cindy, it's a pleasure to be here with you.

Cindy Schuster

Thank you.

Courtney Trang

So how about start off by introducing yourself and I guess your current title at UB and then we'll get into some early background.

Cindy Schuster

Okay, well I am Cindy Schuster, actually given name is Cynthia Schuster. And my current title is Director of the Office of Shared Services. And we report within the A and F organization I report to David Bobart.

Courtney Trang

So, we'll start off with some early life things. You know, where were you born, where you grow up?

Cindy Schuster

Well, I grew up in Baltimore City, and also, I was born there. So, I grew up in Lauraville, which is on the outer area of the city. And I actually lived there until I got married. So, I lived in that area for a long time.

Courtney Trang

Is that right? What was your childhood like?

Cindy Schuster

Very traditional, you know, mom and dad and a sister. I'll say even though it was the city, it was more like the suburbs. Went to this. You know, we all went to the VOC to elementary school. I was part of the busing changes in Baltimore City in the late 70s. So, I ended up going to Catholic school for a couple years. And then I transferred to IND [Institute of Notre Dame, which is down Asquith Street talk about taking a jump that was quite a bit of busing for me. And then I transferred to Western, which probably has a lot of relationships, even with University of Baltimore, then a lot of city identity. I will say.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, so were you a first generation college student, or what was your relationship with when you started college.

Cindy Schuster

I am a first-generation college graduate of my family. And I actually picked University of Baltimore as a student, not as a staff member. And I think, you know, just traditional and what UB brought to me was location, affordability, and a good education within my means. So, I think that that was a defining thing for me.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, absolutely. What major did you start with?

Cindy Schuster

I actually did my undergraduate in Administrative Management in the School of Business. And then I got through that and realize it's sort of funny, because my job now it's really business. But I got through that, and I wasn't 100% sure, that's what I wanted to do. So, then I immediately went to the master's program, but I switched schools. I went through Yale Gordon College of Liberal Arts at the time. And I went ahead and got my master's in public design.

So, I've done the different roundabout. And then I kept with that for quite a long time. And I worked with like manuscript type things, and different things in the university that related to that. But then another degree came up through UMBC [University of Maryland Baltimore County]. Now the Global Campus, and that was a master's in distance education, which has really served me well in a lot of different ways, especially when I worked with media.

Courtney Trang

Absolutely. What year did you start at UB? Your first steps?

Cindy Schuster

I started as a student in 1985.

Courtney Trang

Okay, so it was a lot different at that time.

Cindy Schuster

Yeah. When I started the campus, definitely an upper division school. I'm probably one of the few people at that time. I wasn't 21. I was still 20 When I started. And it sort of really surprised me it just sort of the availability, like faculty members used to bartend as guest bartender at local bars and stuff. And then it was really an adult population. I did day classes, and there were sort of a cohort of us. But it was really very heavily an evening School of Professional people felt a little bit out of my being for a period of time, but I think was also a really good experience.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, absolutely. Did you come to work at UB straight from being a student or did you take a gap or anything like that?

Cindy Schuster

I was one of the people I just did a variety of jobs. So, I you know, pay for my own education. I always had three part time jobs. I was always doing different things. But a portion of it was being like a student assistant I worked for the Law Library was actually my first place of employment at University of Baltimore. And then when I was in grad school, I became a graduate assistant for the Merrick School of Business, which is interesting that I was in pub design [Public Design] doing that. But it was for the Baltimore business review.

So, it was a journal. Okay, which was the originator of the Center for Business and Economic Studies. I'm not sure if the name today but the Jacob France Center [Jacob France Institute]. So, what is today's Jacob France Center, I was the probably the original grant assistance for that. And then I just sort of worked my way through different positions. And then I landed at Langsdale Library, my first regular employment.

Courtney Trang

Okay, so yeah, I was going to say you had, you've had a ton of different roles at UB. So, Langsdale Library, and then from there, what?

Cindy Schuster

I stayed at Langsdale Library for quite a long time, but in different roles. I started out there as a library technician, to do their strategic plan to have a new building built that took 20 something years to have done. We joked, I used to joke about it with Lucy Holman, who was the director, the time when the library became a new building. And I was like, God, it took that long to have that done. That was my first assignment, I always would, I would love to find if there was a copy of that somewhere in archives. This is like an 80-page document. But after that is when we started with the beginnings of the internet, I'll say.

So, I switched to more to automation coordinator. I worked with library systems training employees, which sounds so funny now, but how to use a mouse, that kind of thing. When I started at Langsdale Library, we still dialed in to the main system. And that way for a while, and we they used to University of Baltimore at that time divided out administrative computing and academic computing. So, the library

was administrative, but had a lot of relationship to the academic areas. So, it was sort of an interesting thing to be in.

So, we learned some different things. And then once the internet really sort of came more into being in the beginnings of the web, I moved more towards media. And then just, you know, the craziness of the of everything that happened and how quickly it happened. We originally did interactive video, which is what it is today is crazy. That's suddenly the precursor.

So, we had Interactive Video Network at the University of Baltimore, which linked all the University of Maryland system schools. And then I also coordinated the Maryland interactive Distance Learning Network, which no longer exists. But that put together K through 12, community college and higher education within the state of Maryland. Wow. And it's crazy, Interactive Video Network, which was called Ivan still exists today, they still use it. Oh, wow. Just not as heavily. I would actually have to check. But University of Baltimore, we were still taking classes to Shady Grove.

Courtney Trang

Okay.

Cindy Schuster

I think part of that when COVID hit a lot of that more disappear. But it really is the precursor to what we use today. And it's amazing how far we've come. But in some ways. What we did back then was pretty amazing, too.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, exactly. I was born in '89. So, I kind of had the boom of it with school and everything, but to think of how much you've seen and how much you helped implement, like throughout the university? That's, the groundwork for what we have now.

Cindy Schuster

The development of the Internet, of getting the Internet, I should say. The development of the start of our web pages. I did the first library webpage. I think the university page was out there first, but we were the first to have content linking to other resources and how excited we were at that time.

Like it used to be a big excitement to try to get into another library catalog. You know, using all the different programs, ARCHIE and Veronica and all the different tools that you could use then, and the slow development. First, it was text based links, to do web pages. And then we slowly developed and went to Mosaic and then to Netscape. And then we were all against Internet Explorer at the time. But how far you know how all the different changes we've gone through. And now you don't even have to think about coding things anymore.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, no, you don't. You don't have to think about any of that. You just click in and that's it.

Cindy Schuster

Yeah. And also, all the different tools. I mean, UB has really progressed. I mean back in that time was when we first had first computer labs, and you had to exchange out the floppies to use your different software services. And there was very limited you had to like schedule time to be able to do that. And then get to today where we do still have labs, but you have so many different with Wireless, and all the different options that you have.

Courtney Trang

And the number of computer labs we have on campus. And the different buildings even.

Cindy Schuster

And the different buildings even. We've come a long way.

Courtney Trang

We really have. So, from there, what was your next jump?

Cindy Schuster

Media always because we had interactive video and such, we needed to be a truly a neutral component in a lot of different ways. It's, you know, a lot of the things like at one point, we even did coordination of classes with other institutions where there were students from other institutions. So, it was always a place.

So, the library was a good place for us to be. But with the growth of electronic classrooms, and the growth of the internet, we needed to enlarge. And at that time period, the more business center really came into being. And at that time, it was the smartest built building in the system. So, it had satellite downlink. It had the Maryland interactive, distant learning network. And all the classrooms were electronic classrooms.

And it started out being over Silicon Graphics machinery, which was a Unix based system, but it needed a whole lot more support to the whole group of us were sort of merged in. So, the media really grew, I would say, almost by 300%, at least, to be able to support faculty members, some of them honestly, like joking around, but they obviously didn't know how to use the mouse at that. Yeah. So, it was a lot of training, a lot of facilitation.

And that became our job. So, I moved really out of automation in the library and into I'll say almost public services for the campus and supporting faculty students more in the classroom situations. And when we were doing interactive video, we also traveled to different sites that we worked with. So, we Shady Grove, and Annapolis at the time and Catonsville, Hunt Valley, and we would go help our students get started in their classes. But the media really changed with all the different classrooms we had. I mean, we really did start out with we had one in the law library that really was just used for recording

classroom, moot courtroom exercises, and that stuff. I would consider that our first electronic classroom on campus, but the Merrick School of Business was the second to get widespread. And then we started moving carts. And then eventually, as funding developed all the schools, then had rooms that were of that component. And about at that time also, we then got merged into what was then CIS is today's OTS. They felt that because it was electronic classrooms, they added labs to it. And that worked better in the computing area than the library area.

And that was done, Jim Qualls was the Chief Information Officer at that point, but not too long afterwards, Judy Woods became the CIO. Okay, so I stayed, reporting to her in that role for a good period of time. And that group also totally rebuilt, and totally changed. We no longer like academic and administrative services went away. You know, we're bringing in this thing called PeopleSoft, you know, and all these other different technologies. So quite a good core of people in different divisions and departments. I'll never forget the first meeting Judy would held, we had, we didn't know we were all in the same big department, same division.

So it was that rapid, so many things were happening at the same time, you know, growth in technology changes in the university. So, it took quite a bit of time to get all that underway. But once it was, God would offer me the opportunity to become the business manager for the group, which was a huge shift for me. But at the time, I had two young children. And the evening weekend work was getting to be a little bit more than I wanted it to be. Yeah, so it was a good move. And I stayed with that for a long time to over 10 years.

And we, I mean, OTS developed into the organization we know today, which has been great. And then from that point, the university decided that they wanted to look at the shared services model of different areas. And business management was one of the areas that was looked at and included. Administration and Finance thought that that would be a good thing to explore. And that's what became the Office of Shared Services which I'm now the Director of. Currently that does report to Dave Bobart and his role in Administration and Finance. And for a period of time, they were moving me around to see how the growth potential in that the area would be. To have the experience of going through all the different areas of the university really, I went from academic to administrative. And was also in some ways Student Services.

Courtney Trang

Kind of had your hand in everything, every different pot around the university.

Cindy Schuster

I'm very neutral, because I've worked in every single area.

Courtney Trang

Well, and that's the thing. So, you experienced a ton of growth in a very short time, comparatively, and you clearly persevered through that, and you've grown through that, but what were some of the biggest challenges during those times?

Cindy Schuster

Well, we had a couple of huge shifts, I'll say, more on the academic side. And when we became an upper division university, that was pretty big. It really was, I mean, you go from really having a great majority, truly adult students to having to experience even 17-year-olds, really young people who needed a variety of services different from an older student age. And although a lot of it was adventurous and wonderful. I think that it was quite the challenge. I still wonder today, if we had not gone upper division, what UB would be, but yeah, there will be no way to ever know that.

I think it was a good decision, knowing all the things that was known at the time, and it brought us a new variety of students that has been great. So, I think that that was good. So, sort of a challenge at the beginning. But looking back on it, a good thing for the University of Baltimore, and the other pretty big one was going from three to four schools. And as an alumni, I'm still not happy about it. But I always say I graduated from Yale Gordon College of Liberal Arts. And I did. I didn't want to change that. So, it's sort of funny, but as a staff member, it was just a lot of the backdoors work that happened with that.

Courtney Trang

I was going to say it looks like it should be so simple. And yet, it was not.

Cindy Schuster

No, and making those kinds of changes are just huge and at the time, we'd done quite a few huge PeopleSoft upgrades which were challenges in themselves and making everything work correctly, and we're getting ready to go to Workday, now in July. So that will be another big one. Other true challenges, honestly, UB's really been a good place for me to work and grow. And I love the ability that I had to have some flexibility for my children. To me, that was the only reason I could work.

Courtney Trang

And now we have one of them here.

Cindy Schuster

Yes. And he really did come here from when the time was a kid because we had different celebrations where it was good to have your family with you. UB's always been a family organization in a lot of different ways. I hope we get back to that more. I know we're coming out of COVID still, in the variety of services we offer, but getting more of the family centered events was always fun. But yes, and also, I did forget to say I met my husband here. So, I like the University of Baltimore. We met in undergraduate in the School of Business.

Courtney Trang

So you were both students.

Cindy Schuster

Yes, and coming up on our 34th wedding anniversary.

Courtney Trang

I have to tap you for some Valentine's Day things, you know, later down the line. Okay, speaking of those kinds of memories, what kind of good memories do you have, like the colleagues of yours throughout the years?

Cindy Schuster

We can't tell stories, really, can we?

Courtney Trang

These are the stories that we could tell.

Cindy Schuster

While I always think I've been probably one of the few people that have served under three presidents here at the university, I will say I worked with each one of them. And they each brought a really interesting spirit and strength to the position. President Turner, Mayor of Baltimore City, Midtown, they used to call him wasn't a technology person.

So, we used to go on road shows and stuff with him. But always a gentleman we always used to joke because I was in media, we set up equipment, we did stuff, and he hated that. He was old fashioned. But he always would bring us to the table make sure we got introduced to all the politicians at any of the events and always went out of his way to do that. And I will say even most students would always know who he was. He walked the campus and always had the bow tie outfit on and was dedicated to the arts. And I think part of his legacy also is, you know, the lyric theater is still there, I think University of Baltimore had a heavy hand in its troubled times of getting the Lyric, some backup at least. And then President Bogomolny was our modern president that shocked the world. But at the end, he was really fun. It was you know; I think he brought in some needed change, we needed to modernize certain things. And of course, President Schmoke gave us the Baltimore identity.

Courtney Trang

Kind of tying us more into the community.

Cindy Schuster

Yes, I will say from a technology standpoint, He's the least demanding of all of them. There's certain things that no matter what my job is, I still do here. And that's one of them. And the staff, you know, we've had so many different funny things. But if you really go back to events, well, Block Party, of course, always stands out both as a student and staff member. The University of Baltimore holiday parties. Everybody knows everybody. So that was always a nice thing. And at our years of service awards, which I still miss, they joke about it, it was for my 20th or 25th. I bet some people that I would hug or kiss the president, which was President Bogolmony at the time. And it ended up I did it.

And he was shocked, but took it really well, but then they never did stage things after that. Everybody said it was because of me. But my favorite, favorite person in this, and I want to shout out to him, is Bob Kennedy. The

videos he would do for his staff, so, on your 25th, or whatever, are the best. And I hope that a piece of that's included in the 100th anniversary, because his were always just really to the heart. But I've worked with so many good people, I don't want to forget anybody. But unfortunately, we're starting to lose people that-

Courtney Trang

A lot of staples. Yeah, but

Cindy Schuster

Yeah, but just really, I think that's the reason I've chosen to work at a university is it's always has had the diversity, but the reasoning always to come together as a community. That's really important. And I know you know, there's a quite a few things to work towards. But education is a wonderful thing. We really do change people's lives, truly. And graduation has have always been my favorite day. And even though I'm in administration more now, I try to work graduation when I can. Because it is the day of success.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, it really is. So, as we kind of look back and go forward, what kind of observations you make about UB going forward, or Ubalt going forward, I should say.

Cindy Schuster

Going forward, I hope we create our student volume a little bit more again. I mean, I think we're okay where we are, but I think a little bit more I hope we diversify and can grow international students again. Because it's always fun just to meet people from all over the world.

I mean, how many companies can do that? We get to do that in a university. I think our plans for always, I think we always were Baltimore's university. But I think we're going a little bit more towards that, which I think is also a really good thing. Technology is constantly changing, I think, though, our current system really needs a change out which we're getting. So, I think that that's going to be a really good thing going forward.

We still have location, location, location, that's a President Turner thing, that's what he always used to say, we have location, location, location. And just seeing how the area of Mount Vernon and Midtown are going to change and how that also develops, you be like all the different people coming in from the train, and we're going to get that cohort.

You know, the police academy, I think we do a lot of different growth, both on both ends on training police officers, but also our students who flee being able to participate in different things. It's so exciting to see what's going to happen in three to five years. It's as little as three years as we get the new building put up for where the postal office is now. And what that brings to, I mean, tons more people living in the area, it's going to make a change no matter what I mean, I grumble every morning trying to get into parking right now, but it was for a purpose. It's for a reason and it's you know, just being able to also have community place and what that brings to you be I always thought you'd be was so great. We had a classroom right outside our door. You know, we had the Lyric we had the Meyerhoff we have

Walters Art Gallery, easily within walking distance. I took the history of Baltimore course and I just I re-registered as a student, because I never used tuition remission for an undergrad degree. So, like, I'm just going to do this sort of for fun. So, I was taking classes, I really wanted to, what a fantastic course, I would like to take that class again, I was going to do that, just to see all the different things. And it's being in a city hub still and also all the other academic institutions that surround us. We're in such an area of learning. So that's, I think, one of the things.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, I agree with you. I think that's something to look forward to for sure. And then even, you know, what the possibility that City High School might come and like, that's another way to tie us into the community and, you know, make us Baltimore's University.

Cindy Schuster

They always say in Baltimore, people asked where you went to high school, high school is a big identifier for Baltimore residents.

Courtney Trang

Yes, it is. Western is a huge identifier.

Cindy Schuster

Crazy. I'll never forget, I was on the women's forum for a couple years. And one day, someone asked, Oh, what's your high school? Almost half of us were Western graduates. I mean, it is the oldest girls public school in United States. But still, it was just amazing to me. And it showed that female leadership starts at an early level.

Courtney Trang

Yes. I mean, Western, Poly, City, Paterson. They're, like, huge names, like, I mean, they're just very identifiable high schools. You know, I went to Digital Harbor, I was a part of the second graduating class from there. But it was Southern High School before that. And again, another name that everybody's like, oh, that's where you're where Southern was.

Cindy Schuster

And I think Baltimore is starting to go back into the neighborhood. Like, we used to have the Baltimore City Fair, a long, long time ago, in each neighborhood would have booths down at the Inner Harbor before the Inner Harbor buildings were there. And I think a lot of it is Baltimore identity. UB is a cornerstone, and it solidifies the area too.

Courtney Trang

It does, I agree. Recently I learned that Turner because we're just talking about Schmoke and the things that he's kind of brought to UB, I recently learned that Turner was a collector of things. Like he was a member of the Poe Society. And that's how Poe ended up on the plaza, the bell that came to UB, do you know of any other things that Turner brought to the campus?

Cindy Schuster

Of those areas? He was on every board in Baltimore. I'll put it that way. I do know that much. And he did love collections. And one of my early memories of him is, and this is when I was a student assistant, there was a baby shower for him for his son. And I'll say, a man in a bow tie opening baby gifts. I'll always really remember that.

Courtney Trang

That's so funny.

Cindy Schuster

I was part of his ending tour where he did a lot of different things. And we went to Annapolis, and they really did give a lot of kudos to him. And they did have everybody. And granted, there's not that many law schools, but everybody stood up and it was over half the people. But everybody who gave up and came up and gave speeches. And he really was called the Midtown Mayor. And there's a reason for that.

Courtney Trang

Yeah. He had a hand in everything.

Cindy Schuster

Well, he was on the Board of Trustees at UB, originally. And, you know, definitely most of the older artwork that hangs around up was from him coordinating the collection of that. Within the library, some of the Special Collections work was also he had quite a hand in at different times. And sometimes getting some of the politician's archive work to UB was through his efforts. He always took a very strong interest in the library.

Courtney Trang

Yeah. And it seems like what Baltimore history that the library could preserve is what he like he loved to collect.

Cindy Schuster

Yeah, interesting, man. I'm very glad to have served under him.

Courtney Trang

A lot of people who have been here through the last three presidents, they have very fond memories of Turner, from what I've heard. Is there anything else you would like to say about your career? And looking back on your time at UB?

Cindy Schuster

A lot of people have said, oh, how could you stay here this many years, and I feel like I've had so many changing jobs. And the other thing that's so wonderful about being in a university is the student base always changes. So, it's never the same experience. I'm glad I stayed here. I love education. I always did go towards

libraries. But I like the IT area too. And it's been a pleasure being here. And we'll see how much longer I'll stay.

Courtney Trang

Hopefully, it's a while longer.

Cindy Schuster

I really look forward to the 100th anniversary year, I think there's going to be a lot of fun and a lot of different things that we can do. I think at one point, like when we were doing female leadership, well for Women's History Day, and I was really looking back at all the different female leaders in there first. So, I'd like to write that up a little bit more. But we've really had, you know, the first female business school dean, and there's just been a variety different people. And I would say UB was among the first I think smaller institutions have an easier time of being first.

Yeah, like for interactive video, just for instance, we did stuff in College Park couldn't do. Just because of the nature of who we were at the time, to be able to coordinate a course between three different institutions was unheard of. And yet we did it. We were the first to incorporate a computer into a classroom situation over interactive video, probably even early even in a classroom situation. Because it was when projectors were first starting out. And were very cost prohibitive at that time.

So, the fact that that was able to be done. And just a lot of the different things that are not all technology based, but it's just I always look back, if I could say what was my favorite time of working at UB, it was the start of the internet, it was just exciting. Everybody was interested in and were very willing to take any type of assistance, they were willing to pilot some of our faculty members just put themselves out there they had, you know, and it was fun. So, I think that that would be my favorite time of being here.

Courtney Trang

And things change so quickly, when it came to technology that, you know, we've moved from floppy disks to CDs to the cloud. So, I can imagine that that was a really fun time. Very stressful, but probably exciting.

Cindy Schuster

I will also say through the years, the variety of student employees, y people who came here and to work truly as student assistants, I'm still in touch with a lot of people from 25 years ago. And that to me, also shows the community of UB. They want to stay in touch. They may not even be in the United States anymore, but they still want to know what's going on at UB.

Courtney Trang

Well, that was awesome. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Cindy Schuster

Can't think of anything.

Courtney Trang

I think we touched on every question that I had for you. Thank you!