

Rubie Sample
Professor of English, Department of English: 1977-2008

This is a recording of Interview No. 38 for the Del Mar College Oral History Project. Today is July 11, 2002. The time is 11 a.m. This interview is taking place in Room 145 of the Coles Classroom Building, East Campus, Del Mar College. My name is Roel G. Carmona, coordinator and researcher for this project. Today I'm interviewing Rubie Sample, Professor of English. She has taught at Del Mar College for 25 years.

Q: Good morning, Rubie.

A: Good morning.

Q: How are you?

A: I'm well. Thank you. How are you today?

Q: All right. Thank you for participating in our project.

A: Thank you for asking me.

Q: What department did you join when you came to Del Mar College? What was your teaching assignment?

A: When I first came to the college in 1977, I was really interested in a position in the writing center, but Dr. Stone told me that position had already been filled. She offered me a teaching position instead, and I began teaching remedial courses. I remember teaching English 606 and English 302 and those were certainly challenging classes and wonderful students, but they had severe, as they do now, severe writing difficulties.

Q: What do you remember about that first year?

A: I remember the students. I remember how desperately I wanted to help them to learn to write better, and their language problems were very severe. Their writing skills were weak, but I loved their enthusiasm. What was a problem then, and is a problem now, was their attendance. I found that often it was difficult – had great difficulty in motivating them to stay in class. So that certainly was a problem then, and it's still a problem in retaining remedial students.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about what kind of student population we had then, the campus buildings and facilities compared to what we have now?

A: I remember – let's start with the last part – I remember the facilities were portable buildings. (Laughing). I remember meeting James Pierce and Mike Anzaldúa and how wonderful they were. They were so helpful to me then and now. They were my senior faculty members, and they were so kind and helpful to me with the students. Student population was essentially – I don't see great changes there – large Latino population with very few Black students and more Anglo students, of course, than Black students, but students having needs. Our buildings

certainly were – we've added more buildings since that time to make our campus more student-friendly, and certainly those have been changes. We've made many changes in our buildings structure.

Q: What do you remember about the good old days?

A: That's a good question. I remember the camaraderie that existed in the faculty. The older faculty – many of those persons have retired. I remember their expertise. Dr. Cecelia Embry and others added so much in terms of their experience. Pat Williams, Deanna Schupbach and others added so much experience to the department. I liked that level of camaraderie that we had in terms of their experience with working community college students, so I liked that.

Q: Since you've joined Del Mar College, how has your department grown in relation to the number of courses, number of programs, number of faculty?

A: I find that we are a most progressive department. We have added online courses. We have added all kinds of experiences that students can have. I remember myself teaching a seven o'clock class. So, I find us to be a department that endeavors to meet the needs of the student. We're still teaching remedial courses. We're still offering computer-based courses. We're still offering fast-paced courses. So for every student need there is a – when there is a need, we have met that demand. So, I certainly don't think the community can fault us for not making programs – designing programs that do fit the needs of the students.

Q: How has the College helped you to maintain professional growth and to keep up with developments in your field?

A: I think that any faculty member here will say, and certainly I find that in my department we have all kinds of experiences to help us. I mean we have colloquiums where colleagues come in and share their expertise in different areas. We have opportunities to attend seminars. We have opportunities to develop classes, et cetera. So the person is only limited by the space between his or her two ears – you certainly have the opportunity there.

Q: In what fundamental ways has the College changed during your years here at Del Mar College?

A: I find that we're becoming more and more impersonal. I don't recall in the earlier years – 25 years ago it appeared to me we were more of a community – had a deeper sense of community. It appears to me now that there are strands at work where we are not as personal as we were. As we've grown, it seems to me, we're more impersonal.

Q: In what ways do you think the College is better or worse now than when you started?

A: I believe the College was better 25 years ago. In terms of the experienced teachers that we had, we've lost some wonderful people and we certainly have many wonderful teachers that have remained, but I don't think that you can replace experience with many, many, many wonderful persons who were teaching here. Certainly, I'm not saying that we don't have wonderful persons who are teaching now. But I think that persons that we have lost over the 25 years are irreplaceable. I don't think that you can replace their commitment to the students, their

commitment to the community, their commitment to this college because that experience cannot be replaced in two or three years.

Q: Now, I don't know if you have taught flexible scheduling options – classes off campus, telecourses, online, weekends?

A: I'm rather traditional. I've had opportunities to do all of those. I like the idea of teaching. I've taught remedial classes, for example. I've taught English 1302 classes. I've taught English 1301. I've taught English 606. I've taught English 302 and English 1301. Now I primarily teach English 1302 and American literature. So I've had many, many opportunities and have availed myself by teaching a broad range of classes, but I have not done off-campus courses, telecourses, or online or weekend classes. I do teach at night, sometimes, and I have the opportunity to teach anything that I want. So I haven't found any problem there.

Q: What have been some of your favorite courses that you've taught?

A: You know, I'd have to say to you, I liked all of them. If you ask me what I like best today, I guess I would say American literature. In American literature I, we start with the age of exploration and I like the idea of teaching them from the age of exploration through the modern century. So we're talking about six or seven centuries of materials and I love the fact that, at that level, students are certainly more mature. They are committed and I have found some of my best students in those American literature classes. Because they do bring a maturity and commitment level that I don't find in the 1302 classes. But I'd have to say to you that I've never taught a class that I did not like. But, at this stage, I do like American literature best.

Q: What procedures did you have to follow when asking for a promotion?

A: Oh, gosh. I remember the first promotion we had was very tedious. I was scared to death of the process. So for that first promotion, I had difficulty in processing all of that stuff. I, like many, missed my first promotion because I didn't understand all of the procedures, how to organize, and so I missed that first one. I found that other promotions have been easier. The standards certainly have remained high, but it's much easier to organize that material now than it was 25 years ago when I first started.

Q: Do you think the high number of remediation students at Del Mar College has brought about a drop in academic standards?

A: I wouldn't say that it has brought about a drop. I think that any time you have a community-based college, you must provide for whatever the needs are. The needs in this community are that we have many, many students who are not prepared. So, to me, to not provide for those students would indeed not be proper, correct, or even appropriate for a community-base college. And I don't think offering large numbers of remedial classes is in fact a decline in academic standards. Many of these students I now see in my American literature classes, and they're holding their own. I do realize that there's a large drop rate there, but certainly I don't think that you can ignore the needs of a community. A community college needs remedial classes for students who lack the background, or maybe they were dropouts, or maybe they were in the military, and we must be realistic and meet those needs.

Q: In what out-of-class activities have you participated over the years?

A: I have endeavored to be fully involved in the College and I like out-of-class types of experiences. First of all, I am a public speaker. I'm always presenting myself throughout the state and selling Del Mar College. I love the fact that I meet many, many people and I have the opportunity to sell Del Mar College whether I'm doing work with women or with teens. So I like that. I also conduct projects in my classrooms where students have to get into the community and participate in terms of asking key questions about topics like child abuse, or battered women. And, of course, I've done many, many things in terms of advancing Del Mar College – in terms of my own personal growth in my public speaking.

Q: How do you remember the tenures of Dr. Richardson, Dr. Biggerstaff, Mr. Venters and Dr. Dicianna? How do you remember them?

A: I remember Dr. Richardson being – the key word that comes to my mind is “loving this community.” He loved the community, loved the students and I remember a sense of comfort that he was in charge.

Q: Dr. Biggerstaff?

A: Confusion. I remember Dr. Biggerstaff coming to our campus and making all kinds of changes that I don't think the College was ready for – just confusion is a key word that I remember.

Q: Mr. Venters?

A: Loved him. I think that he, like Dr. Richardson, understood the community, understood our students, understood the faculty needs, and I think that he made a rich deposit into this College.

Q: And Dr. Dicianna?

A: Didn't know Dr. Dicianna as well as I would have liked, but in terms of my own life, I haven't seen that I've had radical changes in terms of his tenure.

Q: How has Del Mar College contributed to the betterment of the community?

A: I think that Corpus Christi would be at a severe loss without us. I think we have contributed significantly in businesses, turning out people who are making a valuable contribution in businesses. I think that we've enabled many, many women – many of our students are women with children. I think we've offered them an opportunity to start over again, to provide a quality kind of life, the American Dream. I think that we are, in fact, a college that provides opportunities for people to have their American Dream. I think without us the quality of life in this community would be significantly less.

Q: What most concerns you about Del Mar College at this time?

A: What direction are we going? I don't know which direction we're going and that gives me some concern – to know where we are going. I think I know where we are going in terms of my own department, but I am keyed into what is the direction for the future? I'm interested in that

direction. I do like the fact that we are moving wider into the community, possibly with other buildings, other campuses, and that I find that encouraging. But I don't know the overall vision of the College at this point, and that gives me some concern.

Q: What significant contributions have you made to Del Mar College?

A: I think that I've made a significant contribution in just being who I am. I came into this community with the purpose of creating in students three things: to think better, to read better, and to write better, and that remains constant for me. I feel my most important contribution to Del Mar College has been being a significant role model to my students and loving them, developing them, and helping them to achieve their American Dream. I do think that I've made a wonderful contribution in being consistent about that.

Q: What major events do you remember in the history of the College?

A: I remember that every time there's a new president, there's a change. (Laughing). As the quality of life changes to fit the vision of the president and when we've had people who have a base in the community, it appears to me that there is less change, but when persons come from other places, they bring a new set of ideas, new visions. So that's always been a significant change because the quality of life and the vision of the college is going to change with the vision of the new president. In terms of my department, I like the fact that so many changes have taken place in 25 years. We have changed our classes time-wise. We are doing online work. We are doing computer-based work. We are doing Saturday classes, et cetera. So I love the fact that students cannot say, "Well, I can't take this class because I can't come in." Well, you've got online. You have Saturday classes. You have evening classes. So I like the fact that we are adapting ourselves to meet whatever needs the students have. I love how the writing center continues to change and adapt. I was talking to a young student who told me, "I just called in and read my paper to a staff person and they helped me." So this woman was telling her testimony to the whole class a few nights ago. That she can get online tutoring from a kind, informed staff. So I like what the writing center is bringing to our campus. And, of course, every year we have the problem of parking. So I'm hoping that someday we're going to solve that dilemma – of how we accommodate all of our students. And, of course, for many of us having our childcare center become a reality has been a vision of many, many, many of us and many of my students are telling me that it's going to change the quality of their lives. If they can have their children in a quality day care, that certainly is going to be a major change. And, of course, all the additions and new buildings that we have on campus add to the quality of life. We have to show that we are progressive people who are adapting ourselves for the 21st century. I consider us, and I think the evidence supports it, as one of the finest junior colleges in the nation. Certainly we have our challenges, and I think there are enough of us who love the college, and love our students, and love the community that we'll adapt ourselves to whatever we have to adapt to continue being the college that we are proud of.

Q: Can you recall any interesting or humorous incidents that happened in your classroom?

A: Yes. I have a thing that I do with students. I don't like for them to sleep. I don't even understand why students would want to sleep. (Laughing). Just a few days ago, I was talking to this student and I said, "You know, sir, you cannot sleep in this classroom. I must see your eyes at all times and I want to see the whites of your eyes. I'm the center of your universe." I'll often use humor

to awaken sleepy students who have morning classes. I remember a student talking to me about my kind manner. I like to treat my students as though they were my children. So I don't bring my problems into the classroom and the kids said to me – a student said to me, "You are so perky. You are so kind. It just makes me sick." (Laughing). And I remember once, against my better judgment, I let this student bring a toddler to the classroom. The child was put on the floor and the child crawled around. Everywhere I moved, the child moved. The class had a big laugh about that. So some of the funniest kinds of things do happen in the classroom.

Q: Which of your colleagues from 25 years ago do you especially miss?

A: Oh, gosh, many of them. I miss Dr. Virginia Stone for the kind, kind way that she treated me. She was the first person that I met when I came on campus. I miss her. I miss Dr. Richardson. I remember my first meeting with him and how he, Dr. Stone, and Dr. Robert Sloan made me feel comfortable. Those are some of the persons I miss. I miss Milton Hawkins.

Q: Who was he?

A: Milton Hawkins was a colleague of mine who had extremely high standards. Anytime students finished one of Milton's classes – he often taught remedial courses – I knew that they were well prepared. Mina Williams. I remember the expertise, the level of excellence that she demanded from her students. I miss them because they brought something to the institution that I think was very special and very important. Diana Cardenas. I miss Diana. I think that Diana brought a uniqueness and confidence that students need. I miss Diana Cardenas from our campus.

Q: How has Del Mar College influenced your life?

A: I often say that when I came here 25 years ago, I improved the quality of my life. I had worked in public schools some ten years. Coming to a community college where I had greater influence on my life improved my health. My health has always been very good and it's gotten even better. So I like the fact that the quality of my life has changed in terms of my health and in terms of the control I have over my life compared with the highly structured, demanding schedule of a public schoolteacher. So I would say, the overall quality of my life has changed. It enabled me to rear my children – my youngest child is 23 now. My children were never latchkey children. Because of the College's flexible scheduling, I was able to pick up my children and do the things that I needed to do for them. It helped me to educate my children. I have a daughter – my oldest child has a master's plus. My son is an attorney. My third child, whom I adopted with my ex-husband, has a fine military career. Del Mar College enabled me to give my children another level of life, to take them into their American Dream. So certainly Del Mar College has been good to Rubie Sample and I appreciate the fact that I am still a member of this faculty. And I tell everyone, when I leave Del Mar College, this will be the end of my teaching career. And I can't even tell you when that's going to be. My health is great. I love my students. I love the job that we do in this community and I'm very proud to be a part of this faculty.