

Mike M. Anzaldúa
Professor of English, Department of English: 1969-current
Interim Dean, Division of Arts and Sciences: 2008-2009
Chair, Department of English: 1989-1996
Assistant Director of the Writing Center: 1986-1989

This is interview No. 52 of the Del Mar College Oral History Project. Today is April 22, 2003. The time is 3 p.m. This interview is being held in Room 145 of the Coles Classroom Building. My name is Roel G. Carmona, coordinator and researcher for this project. Today I am interviewing Mike M. Anzaldúa, Jr., professor of English. He joined the Del Mar faculty in 1969 as a teaching assistant in the English department. Good afternoon, Mike. Thank you for participating in this history project.

Q: What was your teaching assignment?

A: I came to work at DMC in September 1969, right out of graduate school, and have been here ever since. Dr. Aileen Creighton hired me as a Teaching Assistant to work in the English Department – the Basic Studies curriculum, specifically – since I didn't yet have my Master's. My job was to teach 5 classes of grammar, which were coupled with 5 classes George Dickson taught in writing. Jody Moffat (now Heymann) and Dorothy Thompson were right next door on the second floor of the Memorial Classroom building, which then housed the administrative offices downstairs. And Roel Carmona and LaVelle Cox had their offices on the second floor as well, just across the hall. The building was always alive with the noise from the wooden classroom floors – clomp, clomp, clomp.

Q: What do you remember about your first year at Del Mar College?

A: I vividly remember some of the students from those days ... those guys from the Naval Air Station ADCOP program, all so young and bright, and Lovie Brown, a young Black woman who was sharp as a tack. I myself was so young, so green, only 24 years old. On the first day one semester, one of the older guys sitting in the back of the room, said (when I wrote my name on the board), "You'd better sit down, Sonny, before the teacher comes in." Hah! I laughed out loud. And there was an older red-headed woman in one of my evening classes who took a shine to me, and boy, was it a Herculean task that semester to keep her at bay! Would even call me up at home at two in the morning. Brother! And the young Black woman [not Lovie Brown, above] who accused me before Dr. Creighton and Dean Robert Sloan of having given all the *As* and *Bs* to the Anglos and the *Cs* and *Ds* to the Mexican Americans and Blacks! Can you imagine?! I had to show Dr. Sloan the grades in my grade book to prove her wrong. My, my. We all wore ties and dress slacks in those days, and one day a young male student showed up wearing a tie with a naked woman on it. Made quite a buzz. Dr. Jean Richardson, having heard about it, accosted him in the hall. The guy, surrounded by a large group of happy male students, was utterly floored when the President of the College jovially asked him to exchange ties. Dr. Richardson had superb management skills. How clever! Mostly, I was scared all through that first year. What did I know about teaching?! And in college! I felt more like a tutor than a teacher. But I learned fast.

Q: Please compare the College – student population, campus buildings, facilities – as it was when you first came here and as it is now.

A: Everything has changed since I first arrived.

Students: Teachers and students always dressed up, as if in “their Sunday best,” or, as Joan Vanderford would tag it, “ivy league.” I had a time of it. Being poor, I had no clothes, so I had to borrow money to buy stuff to wear for the first few months. The \$625 I earned each month didn’t go far. But everyone – students, teachers, administrators – always looked neat, crisp, and clean. And we were formal and civilized. Most of the students, and virtually all of the faculty, were Anglo, so I always felt somewhat ill-at-ease, and being one of the first Mexican Americans hired by the English Department put me under special, sometimes distasteful, pressure. Students were quite young, most having just graduated from high school. And most were male, of course. But student respect was the order of the day, so things went mostly well. Things with the faculty were more strained because most of them believed I didn’t belong at DMC as a teacher. Nor enough brains, you understand. But I came well prepared, with a 3.6 GPA at the Bachelor’s level and a 3.9 GPA at the Master’s, so no one could formally complain. And life has changed. I’ve become a strong and effective teacher, and a determined advocate of minority rights. And anyway, racial prejudice is not so easy to display these days in our society at large, so it’s harder for people to get away with it here at DMC.

Buildings: I started in the (now) Memorial Classroom building, but I soon moved over to the “yellow portables” (with their noisy window A/C units), about where the parking lot is between the Allied Health and Business buildings are. I had some great times there, along with the rest of those at the bottom of the totem pole (Lupe Rangel, Jim Pierce, John Gunter, Lile Mendoza). The “Academic Campus” (East) was almost totally barren of trees in those days, and the “Tech Campus” (West) remained a mystery to me for many years. The English Building was a place I visited only during my night classes, when only the Department’s waifs were around.

Facilities: Parking was bad, even back then, and being a newcomer, I didn’t have parking lot privileges for several years. Things were a bit more tightly run in those days, eg: we were expected to turn out our classroom and office lights when we weren’t using them. Every building had four types of restrooms – male students, female students, male faculty, female faculty – and older buildings still sport these differences. One day, while I was using the urinal in the male faculty restroom of the (now) Memorial Classroom building, Mr. Little, a math teacher, came in and immediately said, “You’re not supposed to be in here.” It’s a good thing I had my grade book with me; otherwise, there would have been the devil to pay.

Q: What do you remember about the “good old days” at Del Mar College?

A: In those days, many on the faculty would have lunch in the “faculty lunchroom” in the student center. We’d go there in shifts as our classes let out for the noon hour. That was a good experience because we got to know each other across the campus. The faculty was a smaller group then, so intellectual exchanges over lunch were common. I remember that teachers used to affix their assignments to classroom bulletin boards using thumb tacks, and every Friday, after everyone had left, I’d go up and down the halls in the English building looking for new ideas. Theft is a wonderful thing – you learn so much, so fast. We had a Faculty Wives group, to which belonged all the wives of all the (mostly) male faculty. And no one was allowed to attend

Board meetings. Only the President of the College attended. No faculty, no staff – only the President. Ron Williams [Ph.D., West Campus, Electrical Engineering] was the first to defy the “ordinance.” The Board was a group of lofty individuals, including the likes of Dr. Cleotilde Garcia and Fred Heldenfels, Jr., and they were a secretive, powerful bunch. In the English department, Joan Vanderford was busy terrorizing everyone to death, students and faculty. What a tough old bird! (She never did like me. Didn’t think I was good enough. Had given me a *B* in first-semester Freshman English as a student – the only *B* I ever made in English. The one who blocked my getting “Outstanding English Student.” You can tell I haven’t forgiven her, even after all these years). But Katharine Evans more than made up for her! Thank the gods for Mrs. Evans! On weekend evenings, Cecelia Embry, Maudine Prunty and I would go out to eat and then stay up till two and three in the morning talking about STUFF! It was grand. I’d smoke so much we’d get “smoking headaches.” Roel Carmona, recently married, would invite us to enjoy a bowl of Irma’s beef soup at his house. The Department used to drive out to Dorothy Thompson’s ranch once a year and spend an afternoon and evening eating barbeque under the mesquite trees, reciting lines of poetry, and listening to the coyotes howling in the distance. We were a far more social bunch in those days. We’d regularly have a Christmas party and an end-of-the-semester party after graduation – every year. And we’d have a beach party every once in a while. What’s happened to us, I wonder.

Q: Since you joined DMC, how much has your department grown in relation to number of courses, number of programs, and number of faculty?

A: The English department has certainly grown since 1969. We’ve probably tripled or quadrupled in the number of faculty, so as to accommodate the increased number of students. In those days, the English Department consisted of English, Basic Studies, Philosophy, Reading (plus lab), ESOL (plus lab), and the “English Learning Center” (now the Writing Center) – all together as a bunch. Our curriculum included Mexican American Literature, plus isolated classes of Sophomore Poetry, Arthurian Legend, and science fiction. Kenneth Erwin started the “trouble” early with an emphasis on Emily Dickinson and *The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. He came on board the same year that I came, and things haven’t slowed down since he started stirring the pot. You can imagine what Milton Hawkins, Mina Williams, and Jim Williams thought about all this. It was hellish! On top of it, when I became Department Chair I started hiring a few Mexican Americans, and that caused a brouhaha like never before. Even my Anglo friends turned against me for a time. As things stand today, nearly every Mexican American in the English and Reading Departments were hired during my tenure as Chair. Kind of sad, in a way.

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

A: The College has always been very good about helping the faculty with professional growth, even in the early days. When most colleges were requiring faculty to pay their own way to conferences, even in the ’70s and ’80s, DMC already had a history of paying for everything – registration, travel, room, plus meals. And things haven’t changed until very recently (state budget cuts). Moreover, the College library regularly buys books for our department though its own budget, and the department allocated a nice amount for books and films we house in the English Office for use by all English teachers. And the College has always encouraged innovative approaches, such as videoconferencing, Internet access, and the Teaching and Learning Center.

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

A: The “complexion” of the College has changed. About 50% of our students are ethnic minorities, whereas once they were about 20% or 25%, and the percentage of ethnic minority teachers has increased from practically zero to something like 25% or 30%. Our Board of Regents has a majority of ethnic minorities and the President of the Board is Hispanic. Our top three administrators are now Hispanic (a number on the rise) – unheard of until recently! And the Dean of Arts and Sciences is a Hispanic female. Students are much more involved with life beyond the College. Many are married, many have children, many are female – and almost everyone works between 20 and 40 hours per week. Our students are poorer, and they come to us less prepared for college work than ever before. Our night enrollments have swelled. As well, our methods of instruction and our delivery modalities have multiplied. No longer just lecture and lab, our efforts today extend to online courses, telecourses, videoconferencing, tutoring, and mentoring. We are much less dependent on state funding. In the '70s, about 65% of our operational budget came from the state, but today only about 35% does, so local efforts have to make up for it through property taxes, student tuition and fees, government grants, the DMC Foundation, and the Former Students Association. And we have become increasingly technical and electronic in our methods, attempting to engender a “paperless” workplace.

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

A: The College has grown in size, and I’m beginning to think it might be too big to remain solidly effective in its instruction. Too much divergence. Too much committee work. Too many administrative demands. Too much email. Too much voice mail. Hurry, hurry, hurry! No time for thinking, connecting, learning at the faculty level. No time to relax – to read a good book or even watch a good movie. And forget vacations. All of this impinges on instruction, sooner or later, and quality begins a downward spiral. No one can keep up with all the changes. Teachers have troubles with their changing students, Chairs with their changing faculty, and Deans with their changing departments and Chairs. And Vice Presidents are so far removed from instruction that they can’t help us at all. Instead, they create policies and procedures, rules and regulations, in a desperate attempt to control the gathering storm. But to no avail. Our administrators are weaker than they’ve ever been – because they’re managers, not administrators – because they come from the outside instead of rising from within. They’re business people, ever watchful of the bottom line. Do more with less is their constant directive. Improve instruction, but increase class size. And, by the time they finally know enough about the College to do some good, they move on to other pastures. Our students, more poorly prepared than ever, come with hostilities and a litigious inclination. Their lives are fractured and largely cluttered with disparate priorities they can neither make sense of nor reconcile. Our teachers are every year more deeply demoralized. What, then, might be better than before? Our equipment is better – computers and video players. But little else, I’m afraid. Ah, one thing, perhaps. A turning to the concept of a “learning college,” with emphasis on learning styles, critical thinking, interactive classrooms, student collaboration, portfolio assessment, early intervention strategies, learning communities, and the like.

Q: If you have taught using flexible scheduling options (off campus, telecourses, online, on weekends), what advantages and disadvantages do you see in these new methods of instruction?

A: I have not taught using these options, except for evening classes. Yet I see advantages. The use of different modalities reaches a wider audience. More groups are included in the education process. But we've only begun, and many difficulties remain – most importantly, how to truly match the student with the appropriate mode.

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

A: Thank the gods that foot-thick promotion files are a thing of the past. During the days of Nancy Bowen and Deanna Schubach, compiling a promotion file literally took the time of teaching a class during an entire semester. Paperwork was endless, and file reviews inherent obstacles. Self-evaluation, compilation, and organization of instructional materials, authentication of committee work, student evaluations, peer review, classroom observations, absenteeism reports, retention rates, grade distributions, interviews with the Department Chair and the Divisional Dean are just some of the hurdles. Then there were the Departmental Promotions Committees, Divisional Promotions Committees, and the ultra-secretive College Promotions Committee – all with the intent to keep people out of the upper ranks. It was no fun, and the acrimony was rampant. Today, thanks to the doggedness of Milton Hawkins and the clear-headedness of Buddy Venters, we have a more useful procedure.

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

A: No, not a drop in academic standards, but rather a decrease in the amount of work that a student can learn in a semester's time. These are not exactly the same, though they may at first appear to be. Changes in students' lives beyond the college have caused changes in our instruction – not downward, but outward ... more diffuse. Students no longer have the kind of learning time they once had at their disposal. Too many demands on their time, and learning is just one among many priorities in their lives. How so unlike our own experience, when learning was all we were doing, or at least clearly the first priority in our lives. Developmental students can learn the same concepts and skills as more advanced students. The difference is time. Developmental students need more time, and different support systems, than traditional students. The standard of time we use in college (learn everything in a course in one semester) may in fact be outmoded and useless as a yardstick for assessing program efficiency and effectiveness.

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

A: Club Advisor – Spanish club, Chess club, Future Teachers of America, Writing club, Solomon Coles Association, and Student Government Association; and,

- Letters of Recommendation: Students, teachers, administrators
- Program Reviews
- College Self-Study
- Search Committees: Faculty and APT (including Deans and Vice Presidents)
- Task forces – 2002 Summer Academy, Futures Search, Instructional Technology, etc.
- Student Advising – Academic, career, personal
- Faculty Council

- Departmental Council
- Department Chair
- TACHE Officer
- DMC Hispanic Coalition Officer
- Professional organizations at state and national levels
- Former Students Association (founding member)
- Assistant Director of the Writing Center
- Director, Title V Learning Communities

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

A: Richardson – with pleasure and respect (mostly). The most intelligent.
 Biggerstaff – with disgust and disappointment.
 Venters – with warmth and pleasure. The most sociable and amiable.
 Dicianna – with anger at first, but with respect in the later days. The most hotly tempered.

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

A: Corpus Christi and South Texas in general would be intellectually impoverished if not for DMC. Since 1935, it has been churning out skilled technicians and has been aptly educating pre-professionals. Without it, thousands of South Texas students – among them, many Hispanics – would never have receive a college education. Today, you can hardly walk into a restaurant anywhere in town that does not have a DMC certificate hanging on the wall behind the counter ... to say nothing about teachers and bankers and doctors and lawyers and criminal justice personnel of all types. In short, DMC has made a tremendous difference in the quality of life in South Texas.

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

A: A lack of strong leadership – among regents, administrators, faculty, students. An inability to garner strong financial backing from previous students and present local businesses. An inability to lead a successful Texas Association of Community Colleges assault against Legislative injustices directed at community colleges. An inability to work in concert with area high schools and colleges on student academic deficiencies. Presidential intent to develop new campuses. Severe budget cuts. Decreasing hospitalization insurance. Lack of a substantial information flow about critical issues.

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

A: I have taught 10-12 classes every year. My students have learned how to read, how to think, how to work collaboratively in groups, and how to write. But I suspect that begs the question. I have worked as Assistant Director of the Writing Center, Chair of the English Department, and Director of the Title V Learning Communities. I have served on hundreds of committees in and beyond my Department. Through TACHE and through Title V, I have worked on developing new student scholarships. I have worked to improve the spirit and morale of my colleagues.

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

A: John Ciardi – translator of *Dante's Inferno*
Rudolfo Anaya – author of *Bless Me, Ultima*
José Limon – author and educator
Maya Angelou – novelist, essayist
Rolando Hinojosa-Smith – author and educator
Andres Segovia – Spanish guitarist
Dr. Aileen Creighton's commencement speech on Prometheus

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

A: I literally took the boots off a female student one day during a final exam because she wouldn't quit clomping across the wooden floor of the second story classroom and sharpening her pencil. I warned her twice, but on the third time, I followed her to her desk and personally took her boots off. Today, of course, I'd find myself in prison. But back then, everyone in the classroom laughed, including the girl.

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

A: Dorothy Thompson – because she reminded me of my mother
Aileen Creighton – because she had patience with my stupid mistakes
Katharine Evans – my mentor, whom I think of every day
Buddy Venters – because of his geniality, straightforwardness, sympathies, and warmth

Q: How has Del Mar College influenced your life?

A: As I have often said, I have always considered [it] my intellectual parent. I came here as a student and learned everything I needed to know in order to make top grades when I went off to university. I returned and started teaching and have been here ever since, so it's been home to me. I feel more comfortable here than anywhere other than in my own house. I have met the best friends of my life right here (except for one, whom I grew up with in Robstown). And I expect to stay here until I die (but I'll be teaching as an adjunct then). Most of what I've learned in life has been learned right here, on this campus. So I have much to be thankful for. I am hugely proud to be a part of this enterprise, and at the same time I am humbled. I feel fortunate indeed.