

TRANSCRIPTION RE:

**CSUMB Founding Faculty Oral History Project 1995-98
Rina Benmayor, Project Director**

**Interview with Alberto Ledesma, Lecturer and Assistant Professor
Arts, Human Communication, and Creative Technologies Center
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Interviewer, Rina Benmayor, Professor Emerita
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Narrator: Alberto Ledesma
Interviewer: Rina Benmayor

1 **Benmayor:** Okay. Today is October the 7th, 2019. I'm Rina Benmayor and I'm here with Alberto
2 Ledesma from Berkeley. Alberto, do we have your permission to record this interview?

3 **Ledesma:** Absolutely.

4 **Benmayor:** Great. Thank you. This, as you know, is for the CSUMB Founding Faculty Oral
5 History Project. So Alberto, could we start out by asking you to state your name and then a little bit about
6 your biography, just a little bit, and what year you came to CSUMB.

7 **Ledesma:** Yes, so my name again is Alberto Ledesma. I grew up in Oakland, California. I went to
8 UC Berkeley for my undergrad and graduate programs. I'm an immigrant student so I came from Jalisco,
9 Mexico early on when I was about eight years old. All of these things are pertinent later and I talk about
10 them. I graduated [received Ph.D.] I believe in 1996. And so I was there [at CSUMB] in the fall of '95, I
11 believe is when I came as a Lecturer. I was the first Lecturer at Cal State Monterey Bay and was offered a
12 tenure track position pending my finishing my dissertation halfway into my lecturer year.

13 **Benmayor:** So yes, you were the first Lecturer on campus, at least as far as I know. And tell me,
14 how was your contract? Was it such that you could automatically go into a tenure track position or did you
15 have to. . . .

16 **Ledesma:** Oh, no. The contract that I had negotiated with Josina [Makau] was a standard Lecturer
17 contract. I mean at that time I was pretty fresh off the grad school experience so I had no idea, really, about
18 what I was signing. I know for sure now I had no idea because I think I ended up teaching a billion courses
19 that first year. I think that first semester five, and then four the next semester. And so I was making the
20 rounds. [Chuckles] But I loved what I did and to me that experience was foundational. I always knew that I

21 liked teaching and I thought I had pretty good skill in it. I really got tested at Monterey because of the
22 differences between the two kinds of students initially who came: the students from Salinas versus those
23 that came from Monterey/Carmel. Learning how to provide meaningful pedagogical experiences that both
24 met them where they were and didn't ignore one side versus the other, that was a challenge. Still, I was
25 able to do it and I was very happy doing it.

26 **[3:30] Benmayor:** Can you remember what your first impressions were when you first walked onto the
27 campus?

28 **Ledesma:** I was like, "Where is it?" The one thing that I do remember was getting lost. I had
29 rented a car when I went to my interview. I drove onto Fort Ord and, of course, the place looked
30 abandoned. At that time they hadn't built out the main buildings of the University and so I was just trying
31 to get my bearings, you know, where was I supposed to go. The buildings weren't that well marked. The
32 main place that I recognized was the gym. And then I think I started asking around, and people said, "Well,
33 you have to go to that building." And I ended up getting to the police station, actually. You know, [for]
34 somebody who had been undocumented, going to the police station first was just weird. But I eventually
35 found where I was supposed to go. And I think HCOM at that time was in that building that had been a
36 bunker before, I guess. I forget which one. So that's where I had my interview. After that, things just
37 happened. But first, I just thought that it was a little abandoned, especially coming from [CSU] Northridge,
38 where I was teaching at that time. It's a campus with a lot of students. I had come from Berkeley, a lot of
39 students. I was used to just having a lot of density in the university and here I just felt the opposite of
40 claustrophobic. It's like, "Oh, there's just too much space here!"

41 **Benmayor:** So you were already teaching at Northridge?

42 **Ledesma:** I was lecturing there. I was teaching as a part time instructor in Chicano Studies, doing
43 writing classes and I think they let me do one literature class.

44 **Benmayor:** How long were you there?

45 **Ledesma:** I was there for about two or three years.

46 **Benmayor:** Really.

47 **Ledesma:** It was a pretty good amount of time. In fact, when I got the offer to be a Lecturer [at
48 CSUMB], Northridge made me an offer to be their lead writing instructor. And I wanted my own thing. I
49 think a lot of people that ended up going to Monterey romanticized Monterey before we got there. I just
50 kept thinking about all the things I could do if I were there and knowing that Luis Valdez was there,
51 knowing that this amazing faculty were there. Steve Arvizu [founding Provost], who Margarita Melville,
52 who was my mentor was such good friends with, that's who was heading it up. I was very, you know,
53 excited about going there even as a Lecturer. And so it made it so that it was easy to tell Northridge, "No
54 thanks but I'm going to try my luck over there."

55 **[6:53] Benmayor:** So did you apply? Was there a job announcement for a lecturer or did you apply for
56 another job?

57 **Ledesma:** So the way that it happened, I had applied for the normal tenure track position. And I
58 remember going there. When I was there, Qun Wang was there at the same time that I was. And we were
59 sitting outside waiting for our turn to get interviewed. We hit it off right away because he has such a great
60 style about himself in terms of his humor. And I manifest my nervousness with jokes. And so we did the
61 same thing and we were just joking around. I went and did the interview, got a little tour. It was great.
62 Then I think it was a week or so after the interview, I got a phone call from Josina [Chair of the search
63 committee] and she said unfortunately they had offered the position already but they had some good
64 feedback for me. I was disappointed but appreciated the feedback. And then I think in the middle of the
65 phone call she goes, "You know, we're still thinking about hiring lecturers. Are you interested at all?" And
66 I went like right there on the fly, I didn't even talk to Leticia [spouse]. I just said, "Heck, yeah, I would be
67 interested!" And Josina said, "Well, okay. Let me see what we can do. I'll be in touch." I was thrilled. You
68 know, it was like, okay, not dead yet [unintelligible]. I spoke to Leticia but she was in med school at that

69 time and I hardly saw her. The med school schedules when you are first starting out are very rigid and the
70 times that she was in the hospital were sometimes in the middle of the night. And so even though we were
71 in Southern California, I was teaching at Northridge and we were together, there were times during the
72 week where we hardly saw each other. And so to have an opportunity to go to a place like Monterey, have a
73 more normal ... my position in Northridge was a half-time position and I was still finishing my
74 dissertation. . . . , to have a more normal job, you know, we needed the money. I mean it's more money. So
75 we both said, "Yeah, let's just try it." And you know, the rest is history.

76 **[9:36] Benmayor:** [Chuckles] Right, right. Can you describe what your first assignment was in terms of
77 teaching as a Lecturer? What were you asked to do?

78 **Ledesma:** Yeah. The first semester I was asked to do two R&C courses.

79 **Benmayor:** Two what?

80 **Ledesma:** Two writing and composition courses. Or Speech Comm. I forget what we called them.
81 Where students were fulfilling their writing requirement. And then what they wanted me to do was two
82 history classes but remember, I had designed the class and I had designed history from an ethnic studies
83 point of view. We called them American Cultures. I did that course, two versions of it. And then the other
84 one, I think I was doing a ProSeminar. That was one where I had teamed up with Josina. And halfway
85 through that I think I ended up getting assigned to be with Luis Valdez because he was teaching it
86 [ProSeminar] but he wasn't doing the writing component of it. So I was asked to do that part which ended
87 up by me doing therapy for all those students.

88 **Benmayor:** [Laughs]

89 **Ledesma:** It was crazy.

90 **Benmayor:** What do you mean therapy for the students?

91 **Ledesma:** I mean there were a lot of students who were not Latino, and learning the serpentine
92 kind of philosophical approach to embodied knowledge, I can say that now, but back then they were like

93 “Hey, what’s that? “You know?” And there were a lot of Latino students who felt a little intimidated by
94 being at the University. And then we get there – what I would notice even in the classroom, some talked to
95 Luis about this, that students could decode body language really easily. And we could see that the students
96 who had come from like the Carmel-Monterey side, came with a little chip on their shoulders and they were
97 not shy at all about asserting their kind of greater sense of cultural citizenship over the other students. And
98 so of course you have to work with that. How do you create an accessible educational environment when
99 you have those energies there? So, part of the reason I became quick friends with Tomás Kalmar was
100 because I was stumped sometimes. “How am I gonna do this?” And he always had great ideas. Some of
101 them worked, some of them didn’t, but he was never short of ideas.

102 **Benmayor:** Yes. And so at that time we were centers and institutes.

103 **Ledesma:** Right.

104 **Benmayor:** Can you talk a little bit about how that was for you?

105 [12:48] **Ledesma:** Yeah. What I knew was I had just energy and I was willing to do whatever. I was
106 doing all those five classes and I was also working on my dissertation. And so I think I was over
107 caffeinated during those first, I don't know how many years. I was just very giddy because I was always on
108 and dealing in some of the faculty meetings early on. I was very aware of the difference in kind of
109 experience that people have, you know, that sitting around those tables with all the faculty that were
110 making decisions as to policy, as to even governance, everything. You know. I was a sponge mostly, just
111 kind of listening. But I also paid a lot of attention and tried to understand what my role was. Where I fit in
112 things. And so what I had to offer was, I think, having been at a university like Berkeley and at Northridge,
113 I knew a little bit about what they needed to have: a space where you are going to have a mix of cultures
114 that were supposed to kind of complement each other but that were probably going to be clashing in some
115 ways also with each other. I really had had some experience with that. And I think that was appreciated.
116 And some of the things that I would offer, I would try to bring that up. So while I was still a Lecturer, I was

117 given a lot more than just teaching to do. Once in my tenure track position, once I accepted that --I exactly
118 forget the sequence but before the year ended I was given that offer -- and immediately I knew that I had to
119 do a lot more committee work.

120 **Benmayor:** You had your interview at the end of the first year that you were at CSUMB?

121 **Ledesma:** I think ... to be frank with you I don't think there was an interview for the tenure track
122 position. It was just an offer.

123 **Benmayor:** [Chuckles] Really.

124 **Ledesma:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I know.

125 **Benmayor:** How did we do that?

126 **Ledesma:** I don't know, the magic of whatever.

127 **Benmayor:** That's interesting. I have to look into *that*.

128 **Ledesma:** The mind gets foggy now. But I did expect an interview. What I remember was I was
129 given a letter of condition that if I finished my dissertation by December 15 . . . , so it might have been like
130 a year and a half. That's when it changed. I think I did almost a full year and then as I was finishing up that
131 full year, that's when I got the letter. I had finished two chapters when I was given the letter. Maybe it was
132 in May or something like that, that I was supposed to finish by December. And man, I never worked as
133 hard as I did then.

134 **[16:19]**

135 Since you need to teach as many courses even as an Assistant Professor, and [I had to] finish the thing by
136 December. I think it was early December that I filed. I don't really remember an interview. I just remember
137 talking about that letter with Ken Nakashita, I think.

138 **Benmayor:** Ken Nishita.

139 **Ledesma:** Ken Nishita, yeah. Because he had played a leading role. He was supposed to be my
140 mentor around governance stuff with faculty.

141 **Benmayor:** He was the union rep.

142 **Ledesma:** Yeah. He just guided me. And I'm like, "Okay, I'll do whatever you want me to do."
143 And then Betty McEady also was very helpful. You were helpful. I remember I basically lived in your
144 office. I kept asking questions. You know, it was such a small group of people that I felt supported by
145 everyone.

146 **Benmayor:** But you did incredible work. I mean, that was hard to do!

147 **Ledesma:** You know, the situation allowed me to do it. Because I wanted to be there and I wanted
148 to make an impact. I had the opportunity, and then the students started appearing. Students that appreciated
149 the work that I did. So that mattered a lot for me. I had already taught a lot of classes by the time I got to
150 Monterey. I knew you can choose the class to teach but you don't choose the students you get and
151 sometimes it doesn't work because of that.

152 **Benmayor:** Yeah. Were there any particular committee assignments that you had? Did you chair
153 any committees or do you remember any of that?

154 **Ledesma:** Yeah. Early on I chaired the ENGCOM committee, the English Communication. I think
155 for about ten years I chaired that. And I loved it because I was teaching so many of those courses that
156 sometimes I would come in and say, "Okay, that didn't work so let's do something else." And then we
157 hired a lot of people in this area and they were brilliant. So for me it was also a lot of learning about first of
158 all how to make the requirements in a way that was progressive, that wasn't replicating a very conservative
159 view of written communication. Something that was meant to be helpful, particularly to students who saw
160 themselves not as strong writers. So I loved it. It allowed me to take some of the Freirian stuff that I had
161 been trained under and really was the quickest application of that. And I loved teaching. I got to choose the
162 books that I taught, I loved teaching stuff that was in Spanglish in a writing class. So that was great.

163 **[19:37]**

164 I also have to backtrack a little bit. When the Burciagas [Cecilia and José Antonio] were there they were
165 also very, very supportive. Because they had come also from a larger university context, I think they
166 quickly recognized in me as someone who could help define some policy. Because whatever policy got
167 defined they could test with me [if it] would benefit other young scholars of color coming through the
168 campus. And I was totally game for it, and whatever. And so when Octavio [Villalpando] got there and
169 other folks that were part of that scholar-of-color community in education, I had already established a
170 relationship with that community. I valued them a lot. I was also in the Culture and ... I forget the...

171 **Benmayor:** Culture and Equity [university learning requirement]

172 **Ledesma:** Yeah. I was also in that one, although I didn't chair it. I just argued a lot in it.

173 **Benmayor:** [Chuckles]

174 **Ledesma:** I remember having a big argument with Ruben [Mendoza] one time.

175 **Benmayor:** Over what?

176 **Ledesma:** I just remember the argument, I forget exactly the details. I just remember feeling really,
177 really passionate and feeling that he hadn't maybe changed and yet everybody voted for him no matter how
178 [unintelligible] he was. I couldn't figure it out. And so that's when I realized that the reasonable person that
179 I thought I was. . . you still have to make the case. I appreciated the deliberate nature by which we were
180 setting up the University. Even going to Academic Senate meetings. . . . I think generally everybody was
181 on the progressive side but there were still nuanced differences. I really liked being a part of that. I
182 absorbed everything, and within the HCOM [Human Communication] community, the kind of the
183 conversations we had there. You, Josina [Makau], Debian [Marty], Tomás [Kalmar], Qun [Wang]. I mean
184 just those conversations were great to help lay the foundation. And then when we went to the Faculty
185 Senate, just to be there and to see how things were being built and how disagreements would kind of
186 evolve. The sad part of course is when things got really a little difficult with Steve [Arvizu] early on, with

187 that kind of revolution really that happened. But I learned so much from that, too. Because in critical
188 moments, in special moments I think people learn the most. I certainly did.

189 **[22:42] Benmayor:** So speaking of that ... I am assuming that part of the attraction to the University was
190 its Vision Statement.

191 **Ledesma:** Yes.

192 **Benmayor:** And so how did you see yourself enacting that Vision? And then how did you see that
193 Vision shaping up with the conflicts that were happening on campus?

194 **Ledesma:** For me, that Vision Statement was the reason I really wanted to be a Lecturer there. I
195 saw it as a real progressive, serious, mature response to the attempt to divide California society. We had
196 seen that in various [state] laws before the University was founded. And it was a very mature embrace of
197 the spirit of affirmative action, which I love. As someone who graduated in Ethnic Studies everything
198 resonated for me. So when I went there I thought that everybody was on the same page with that. I quickly
199 learned that no, that there was diversity even among the people who wanted to move in this so-called
200 progressive direction. I had seen myself in the Vision Statement for sure. I think that there was some
201 acknowledgement of the kind of the demographic changes, the Latinization of California. For me of
202 course, I always thought about immigration status because of the work that I did. And that's part of the
203 reason Monterey was so critical for me, because I knew that undocumented epistemology was going to
204 emerge at some point as a core experience that the University could respond to. That there were people
205 there who would not be afraid to respond to that. And so that resonated a great deal with me. I was just
206 shocked by the kind of political maneuvering of power. The way that the State was leveraged against the
207 University. The way that leadership and money and kind of the foundation, for example, was not
208 necessarily in the same place as. . . . And then you saw the differences among the students. You saw that
209 students came who did not want to be bothered by becoming culturally competent. And I'm like "Okay, so
210 it goes one way, right?" I saw models for how you dealt with some of this stuff. I remember distinctly

211 [25:53]

212 one of the first times I was totally exhausted, we had had a big event where all the faculty showed up and
213 the community and students. We had done so much work. If you remember, we did a lot of work before the
214 students even came.

215 **Benmayor:** [Chuckles] We didn't have much time. But ...

216 **Ledesma:** Right. Exactly. But I was staying up late at night finishing syllabi, all these different
217 things, right? And we had this grand opening. We went up there and I was tired. And I remember
218 [President] Peter Smith [gave] a speech that was not that inspiring. And I'm like, "Oh, boy. Here we go."
219 And then Luis [Valdez] went up there and he gave a speech that was unapologetic. To me it said all the
220 right things. Still a little nationalistic for my likes but you know, the embrace of a new direction and a sense
221 of responsibility with those who haven't had their priorities addressed. That to me resonated so much and I
222 remember leaving inspired by that. And I think that set the tone for a lot of the work that I did early on. I
223 knew that in spite of all these fights we were having, differences that we had, there were enough people
224 there at the core who could really do something revolutionary with that University. And during the time
225 that I was there I believe that I thought that everything was happening exactly the way that I thought it
226 would.

227 **Benmayor:** And how did you feel when the conflict sort of broke out over the firing. . . I guess,
228 the reassignment of administrators?

229 **Ledesma:** I felt upset. But even in feeling upset I recognized that I was invested. I think what that
230 to me signaled was that the Vision that had been developed was bigger than [Provost] Steve [Arvizu]. That
231 the University model was bigger than one person or one set of interests. And that kept me at the table to do
232 whatever I could. Because I learned a lot about myself. I think one of the big things that shaped me both as
233 a teacher and as a scholar was Josina's invitational communication work. I didn't know it that well before I
234 went there but I think I was already predisposed to it. Because of my own political vulnerability, of my

235 experience, that you can't change policy around undocumented immigration without allies. And to have
236 allies you have to have some invitational process by which that topic is introduced and debated. So the
237 more I learned about that model of rhetoric the more it just gassed me, it was like, "Wow, this is exactly
238 what I want to do." And so I looked a lot to her during the time when we had that transition because I
239 wanted to see how she would grapple with it. And I saw her struggling a little bit with it but at the same
240 time I thought that she made decisions that were pretty solid. I thought that you were also grappling with
241 the same thing. I mean all of us in HCOM, you know, with Tomás and I think of Qun and I as the two
242 junior faculty. I think he was more adverse to getting involved and rolling up his sleeves than I was because
243 I like to argue. And I did that – I tried to do it in an invitational way. But I still try to poke my finger in the
244 wound to say if we're going to heal it we need to understand it, we need to do it in a good way. I thought
245 that's what Josina gave me. It took my fear of asking hard questions away. It allowed me to ask those same
246 questions in seemingly polite ways but they were still hard questions. And that's what I've been doing ever
247 since. I thought that was invaluable.

248 **[30:45]**

249 And so, you know, when Steve stepped down [as Provost] it didn't mean that we couldn't be asking the
250 same questions that he was asking. And so along with Octavio, Donaldo [Urioste], there were a bunch of us
251 I remember that got together and we ended up doing a presentation for NACCS [National Association of
252 Chicana and Chicano Studies] that asked that question, about the kind of University CSUMB was trying to
253 become. And it was that attempt to stay around the table, not to give up our chair, but still pose that
254 question, because we felt that that question was something that all of us should address and not just the
255 Latinos in the group.

256 **Benmayor:** Do you feel like you made any inroads or contributions in terms of policy on the
257 campus or attitudes?

258 **Ledesma:** I thought that for me the sign that some of my perspective was being incorporated ... I
259 remember some suggestions that I made that were put into policy and that always was meaningful to me.
260 When Paul [sic] Smith chose me and there was an African American junior professor also, as the two co-
261 chairs of a climate committee.

262 **Benmayor:** William Franklin.

263 **Ledesma:** That's right, yeah. That that was kind of a recognition – I mean it might have been a
264 little manipulative, too, you know, to choose the people without tenure power to chair this. But at the same
265 time there was something there that I thought meant that we have someone's ear. Or we have the capacity
266 to have someone's ear. And that was important, you know. It didn't make the work that we did in that
267 group any less fearful of pushing in the right direction.

268 **Benmayor:** And what were you asked to do?

269 **Ledesma:** We were asked to convene a number of meetings and to reflect on the question around
270 climate. I think we ended up doing a report.

271 **Benmayor:** What kind of climate?

272 **Ledesma:** This was ... I'm trying to think back.

273 **Benmayor:** I mean it wasn't the weather, right?

274 **Ledesma:** Oh, no, no. It was the campus climate. The kind of tensions, cultural tensions on campus
275 and how to address them. What would be some directions. And we were not the only faculty in the group.
276 There were a bunch of faculty including, I think Christine [Sleeter] was in that group too, because we
277 ended up kind of writing the report together. Were you in the group? I can't remember.

278 **[33:45] Benmayor:** I don't know. I have no memory. I don't think....

279 **Ledesma:** Maybe not. But there was a pretty good handful. And there were people from the
280 community. That guy from Alianza, I forget his name, he was very active. Not Alianza, from ...

281 **Benmayor:** LULAC?

282 **Ledesma:** LULAC, yeah.

283 **Benmayor:** Oh. Bill Melendez.

284 **Ledesma:** That's right, Bill was in it. And there were a bunch of other people. There were some
285 consultants in it. It was some heavy work. But to me the thing that ... that made me feel like that it was a
286 real thing was that we were not given any conditions. We were just given a charge. "Here's a charge. Go
287 for it and whatever comes." We ended up writing a report that I thought was very honest.

288 **Benmayor:** Did anything come of the report?

289 **Ledesma:** I left soon after that, so I don't know. You tell me!

290 **Benmayor:** [Chuckles] What year was that? What year did you leave?

291 **Ledesma:** I left in I think '99 to 2000, around then.

292 **Benmayor:** And what was it that made you leave?

293 **Ledesma:** Well, I didn't leave voluntarily. I left because there was this little kiddo that was being
294 born and Leticia said, "Help!" And so I didn't know what I was gonna do. And at [UC] Berkeley, they
295 offered a visiting position and matched my salary, and I said, "Okay, I'll take it." And so I was there for a
296 couple of years in that capacity. And so the first year when I left my intention and Leticia's intention, even
297 our little baby infant's intention, was to go back to Monterey for me to submit my tenure dossier and try to
298 stay at Monterey till I would retire. That was my goal. For Leticia there were a couple of things that were
299 hard. She actually got a job offer at a clinic in Salinas. We went and checked it out. We went to the
300 hospital there in Salinas. She was about to sign. I remember kind of struggling with her because the model
301 of medicine that they practiced was very different than the kind of model that she had trained for and she
302 wasn't sure if she was going to thrive there.

303 **[36:31]**

304 At the same time both of our parents were in East Oakland and we had this little girl now, that was one year
305 and a half old and they loved her to death. They were sad because they thought we were going to be

306 leaving. Then she [Leticia] said, “Well, there’s a position over here that I could apply to that is closer in
307 doing the kind of medicine that I want to do. And it would mean that we will stay here but you would need
308 to extend your leave. She got the position. She turned down Salinas. She got that position. And she ended
309 up staying there for many years. So I ended up leaving not because I wanted to but because the
310 circumstances required it.

311 **Benmayor:** Right, right.

312 **Ledesma:** I ended up having to change careers because of it, too. Because I loved doing what I did.
313 But after two years Berkeley had the rule that [in a visiting position] you can’t teach anymore, you have to
314 do something else. I could have gone back [to CSUMB]. I tried all kinds of, you know, tricks to stay and
315 do what I was doing. But it was harder to keep the health insurance that we had, even though Leticia now
316 had a good situation in her clinic. UC Berkeley’s health insurance was much better than that, I thought.
317 And for our daughter we thought we’ve got to keep it. And so when that staff position opened up in the
318 School of Optometry . . .

319 **Benmayor:** The School of Optometry?

320 **Ledesma:** That’s where I ended up **working, remember?** I was Admissions Director at the School
321 of Optometry. Like “How the hell do you get that position**?!?”** **Not deliberately.** It’s like the only thing I
322 had as a pre req is that I wore glasses!

323 **Benmayor:** [Laughs]

324 **Ledesma:** That was it. I had no idea what I was doing there. But what I knew was faculty culture.
325 What I knew was how to talk to students in a respectful way. How to sell a program to them. How to work
326 with colleagues. How to work with administrators so that we had diversity initiatives, I could actually
327 provide leadership in that area. And you know, something that was a part-time job became a real offer very
328 similar to the way that it had been in Monterey, half a year into the program. The Dean goes, “No, you’re
329 not going. You’re staying.” And I’m like, “Cool! I have to pay my mortgage.” Yeah.

330 **Benmayor:** Thinking back, how did CSU Monterey Bay offer you an ability to be creative and
331 what was that creativity?

332 **[39:32] Ledesma:** Well, it definitely offered that ability. I think there were no ideas that were rejected as
333 soon as they were offered. I think what I really appreciated from that initial cohort of faculty that came
334 together to design Monterey is that they would listen to anything and respectfully consider it and engage it.
335 And for me it kind of opened a part of my brain that I never knew that existed. I mean first of all,
336 outcomes-based education. I had never done that before. Right?

337 **Benmayor:** Nobody had. [Chuckles]

338 **Ledesma:** I know. And so that's – I honor [Joe] Larkin's work for that. Because those sessions we
339 had where we were taught what it was and the fact that we weren't doing it, those. . .

340 **Benmayor:** The fact that we were taught what?

341 **Ledesma:** The fact that we weren't initially doing true outcomes-based education. I mean that was
342 his punchline all the time, you know?

343 **Benmayor:** Right.

344 **Ledesma:** So I really appreciated that. I learned a lot about how ... I think that in other universities
345 that I'd been at, the syllabus is not seen as a contract with the students in the same way that it was in
346 Monterey. I learned also a lot about how assessment was critical, not necessarily for what you think is
347 appropriate knowledge but also for validating knowledge students already had. Those were things that
348 became values for me later on. I really appreciated that a great deal. It was a lot of tedious work, though.
349 Just to go to all those sessions and keep learning about LO's.

350 **Benmayor:** Learning outcomes.

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352 [Lines 348 to 358 – a side conversation about the interviewer's dog who made an appearance in the video]

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360 **Benmayor:** Okay, so we ask everybody to think about what they felt they accomplished at CSU
361 Monterey Bay and what their legacy might have been, and also what disappointments there might have
362 been, you know, challenges. So maybe start with the challenges.

363 **[43:09] Ledesma:** Yeah. I think the challenge was early on delivering on some of the expectations because
364 I think we were all over the place in terms of what we wanted. And if you remember, I was supposed to
365 have been the person teaching history. And Paul Smith -

366 **Benmayor:** Peter.

367 **Ledesma:** Oh, Peter Smith. Paul Smith is another person. Peter Smith commented to someone one
368 time that he did not really like the way history was being taught at Monterey Bay. And there was only one
369 person teaching history at Monterey Bay at that time, and it was me. I remember going to lunch and he was
370 there, and feeling just like angry. I didn't know what to do, what to say. I think that because I hadn't been
371 formally trained in that area, I mean the history that I knew was kind of interdisciplinary based history that
372 I had learned in Ethnic Studies, which of course since then has now become more of what is being taught. .
373 . . I mean Howard Zinn's work and Takaki's work, all that. That's what I did. To me that [the comment]
374 was kind of an early frustration. I think that the students that I had also often came in wanting to get like
375 this master narrative [history] and just learn facts and dates and not really have any kind of subjective
376 relation to the [subject]. I always [said], "Okay, we're studying history from the ground up and we're
377 gonna learn how what's happening today is actually still connected to all these [past] events that we're

378 learning about.” So for me early on that was a big challenge. Although, I was happy that two weeks after
379 my initial kind of brushing up with President Smith, I saw him again there at the cafeteria, like far away in
380 the cafeteria and he made it a point to say, “I really like the way history is being taught!” And there was
381 still one person teaching history and I knew that he meant it for me. I think he had heard that I had been
382 very disappointed by what he had said. So I was like, “Okay, so something’s happening here.” It was a
383 meaningful moment for me. What were your other questions about?

384 **[45:46] Benmayor:** Well, what you felt that you contributed, what your legacy was.

385 **Ledesma:** Yeah. I think my legacy had to do with a kind of engagement of difficult issues on
386 campus, again where I applied the invitational theory model but always brought up tough stuff. I remember
387 there were a number of students, Augie Aguilera, if you remember, he wasn’t the only one, who
388 commented to me after a number of years that we had been there that what they wanted to do in life was
389 what I was doing there, which was tackling these things and to immerse myself academically in them. And
390 write about them. And just not ignore important issues. So that to me, I feel, was the thing that I left
391 because I remember hearing even after many years of having been gone, from students saying that they
392 appreciated that I would not avoid difficult discussions. Even from students in some of my American
393 Cultures classes or American Cultural Heritages classes, some of the students who initially had come in
394 very skeptical about my take on things and then became friends, then became people who would ask me for
395 letters of recommendation and would end up going to graduate school and still wanted to stay in touch. You
396 know. Some of these students really made me feel validated. And so I felt that that was a legacy that was
397 important for me.

398 **Benmayor:** Well, in many respects your connection with the students at all levels sounds to me
399 like it was primary for you.

400 **[47:56] Ledesma:** Yeah. Absolutely. I think because I was a junior faculty member, a lot of students. . .
401 because we had a lot of students who were transfer students also. And we were almost the same age. I

402 remember having a lot of *mujeres* in some of the classes [who] were probably exactly around the same age.
403 And we were having conversations. I remember teaching that Autobiografias class that you were supposed
404 to teach but you couldn't teach and so I got it assigned to me. I think you had already chosen the books.
405 And it was going to be a feminist class. Including Cherríe Moraga's work and Anzaldúa. *Esta*, Juanita was
406 in that class. I don't know if you remember Juanita? She was a recently arrived Mexican immigrant
407 student. Very smart.

408 **Benmayor:** Juanita Perea?

409 **Ledesma:** Perea, yeah.

410 **Benmayor:** Oh, yeah.

411 **Ledesma:** Ana Castillo, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa were not her cup of tea. She was
412 like, "They're blasphemous!" You know, they're like [unintelligible]. We had some fireworks in that
413 class! In *español* even! It was cool. That was a great opportunity. I really appreciated them and think of
414 them fondly.

415 **Benmayor:** Well, with that, Alberto I would like to thank you for taking the time to share these
416 memories with us. It's really a pleasure and an honor to talk to you and to hear how all of that work has
417 infiltrated and shaped who you are today.

418 **Ledesma:** Thank you so much. Again, Monterey was a very important part of my life when I was
419 there. Those five years or so that I was there were very rich. I loved every minute. Even though I didn't like
420 the snakes, skunks or spiders, I still enjoyed every minute of being there. And to me the most important
421 part were the friends and the colleagues that I had. So, thank you.

422 **Benmayor:** Well, thank you, Alberto and I'll stop the recording now.

423 (END OF RECORDING)

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