TRANSCRIPTION RE:

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

Interview with Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita
Teacher Education
College of Education

Interviewer, Marsha Moroh, Professor Emerita
Former Dean, College of Science

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Moroh: This is Marsha Moroh and I am interviewing Christine Sleeter. Today is October 8, 2015 and we are in Christie’s house. And we are about to begin. Oh yes, state your name and that you’re doing this not under duress.

Sleeter: Christine Sleeter and yes, we have full permission.

I’d like to talk to you about the very beginning days and your coming to CSUMB. We all have stories that bring back the memories of what brought us to CSUMB, so could you describe the moment that you first heard about the university and tell us what it is that grabbed you about this particular opportunity?

[1:00] Sleeter: Joe Larkin, my partner, and I were thinking about moving anyway. We’d both been at our institution, University of Wisconsin-Parkside about as long as we wanted to be there. It was not a bad place to be, it was just that I had outgrown it. I was teaching the same courses over and over again and was getting tired of that. And Joe had had kind of a fallout with some of the administration there and was working for Milwaukee Public Schools at the time on a desegregation project. So both of us were interested in relocating. So we subscribed to the Chronicle of Higher Education, which at the time was all in print, not online, and started plowing through the job ads. I remember when saw the job for faculty at CSU Monterey Bay. I was like, “Wow! I’ve never seen a job ad like this before!” What resonated with me was that it was asking for people with backgrounds in ethnic studies, women's studies, disability studies, postcolonial studies and I was like, “I want to be a part of that, that really speaks to me!” It also said that they were interested in non-traditional job arrangements, which for us meant the possibility of job sharing. As it turned out, we applied together. We actually wrote a cover letter that was for both of us and had our resumes stapled onto it.
I later figured out that when it got here, they were like, "Uh, job sharing? Uh, we don't know how to do that," and they separated the resumes. So they interviewed me and not Joe. But the other thing was that I had been told . . . and I've been trying to remember this morning who I heard this from. I don't think it was Steve Arvizu. I think it was a colleague of his and also of mine at the time, a guy named Henry Trueba who was really well known in multicultural education. He is a Mexican anthropologist who had come to the U.S. and for a while was Dean of Education at UC Davis. For a while [he] was Dean of Education also at University of Wisconsin-Madison. And I don't remember exactly where I got to know him along the line, but I think it was him [sic] that had told me about hearing that there was possibly going to be a think tank established in California around the Fort Ord area in multicultural education and that I might want to think about at some point becoming a part of that. And so when I saw this job ad and remembered hearing about the possibility of this think tank. . . . That may have been something that Steve was thinking about initially that never quite materialized, because once you get into the CSU system it’s not exactly set up for academic think tanks. But that was something that was in the back of my mind. Anyway, it was the job ad. And what I saw in the job ad in terms of my interest in multicultural education, ethnic studies, women's studies, and that really pulled both of us here, because for both of us, it was like, wow!

Moroh: So can you describe your first feelings when you got here, when you first came to the campus?

Sleeter: When I first came to campus I wasn’t sure what to picture. I remember coming in November. It was before the WASC [Western Association of Schools and Colleges] meeting. I met you. Who else did I meet of the founding faculty? I remember sitting in a room. [Dean] Dorothy Lloyd was there.

Moroh: Armando [Arias].

Sleeter: Armando was there. There were some others there but I can’t remember. It was a rather small group. I was just excited. I don't remember if it was at that meeting. . . . I came here previously for
an interview before that meeting and at one of those was driven around the campus. I was in a car with Steve Arvizu and a couple of other people and he was talking about the vision for the campus. We’re driving around this closed military base [laughs] thinking, "Well . . . okay . . . , there’s potential here." I remember having somewhere in my mind that there was going to be more put in place than was actually the fact. I guess if I had thought about it, here it was a closed military base and I was one of the first wave of hires. But I do remember having in my mind that there would be infrastructure there. I even envisioned a parade and celebrations and stuff for opening up this new campus!

[6:32] And so when we got here, it really was just meeting in these buildings that had been vacated by the army and nothing had been done since the army left. It didn’t diminish the excitement, but it made the job in front of us look a bit more daunting. [Laughs]

**Moroh:** Now that you are remembering those early days from a perspective of much later, how do you feel now about those early days, putting in perspective all that has transpired since then?

**Sleeter:** Well, yeah, the early days, it was exciting. I’m getting all of these mental pictures. Just to describe a couple of them: One of them, I remember meeting in Building 84? I still get the 80’s mixed up. There was this munitions room with the grated door. Maria de la Luz Reyes and I were climbing all over it and taking pictures of each other. [Laughs] It was like. Wow! I remember meeting Josina [Makau] when she was staying in a hotel. That was when we had really heavy rains. We need them again. And she and Carole had lost the house that they were staying in [to the flood]. Because they had a cat, and pets weren’t allowed on campus. I had two dogs and I was like, “Well, oh dear! What am I gonna do?” Right around then [President] Peter Smith changed the policy when he saw the result of not allowing animals on campus. But I remember that was how I met Josina.

[8:38] I remember just vestiges of the army all over the place. On the lintel of one of the buildings that we would walk into, above somebody had painted a sword and below they had painted on the ground blood, the sword with blood dripping down. It was this juxtaposition of us coming with a vision of building
something that would be revolutionary, inclusive, and coming into this place that was a symbol of U.S. military might. The clash in visions for me was just jarring. But it also, I felt like there was one vision that was replacing another vision, so the idea of swords into plowshares. We were coming in as part of the plowshares. Even though there was almost no infrastructure when we first got here, no library, no food service, not much of anything. It was still really exciting because there was the opportunity to reimagine higher education and to reimagine it from perspectives of people who have traditionally been excluded. I'm white so I'm not one of those people that is traditionally excluded, but the work that I've done to try to push back the walls and bring in diverse perspectives and diverse people and make school so that it works for diverse people, that was really exciting.

[10:37] Moroh: Was there a moment when you really felt confirmed that you were really in the right place? Did that happen right away for you or did it take some time?

Sleeter: No, it was all along. I knew I was in the right place right from the beginning. There were times that were frustrating. As you know, I've always tried to balance my work here with my external national work. So I wanted to keep up my publications. When I came here [in January], I had a workshop someplace else and a conference to go to. So for me it was always trying to balance these two worlds. The CSUMB world and the work that I do outside of CSUMB. And I think that ended up being the biggest struggle that never completely came together. Steve [Arvizu] did try to acknowledge that faculty needed time to do their research by giving us, I think it was Friday, when there were no meetings. But just the around-the-clockness of the work, and then when the 5,000 or whatever applications for faculty positions came in, telling you that you had Friday to do something else didn’t make the piles get shorter. [Laughs]

Moroh: So as we finish this section, when did you actually retire from CSUMB? What year was it, do you remember?

Sleeter: It was when I turned 55. I just turned 67.

Moroh: So, what was it that prompted that moment?
Sleeter: The retirement moment?

Moroh: Yes. What motivated you to leave at that time?

Sleeter: I was getting so tired and frustrated. It was the culminating result of a lot of things that happened. I was so tired and frustrated, trying to do as much as I was doing, that I would come home sometimes and just start crying. And at the end of a break, when we would go back and have meetings, I would come home frustrated and crying.

Moroh: Well, we’ll come back to that.

Sleeter: When Joe found out, being a year older than I am, that you could retire when you were 55 and we could also take our retirement from Wisconsin at 55, even though it wouldn’t be full retirement and I would still have to keep working to have a livable income. For my sanity, that’s why I did. But I'm still glad I came here.

Moroh: Okay. [Chuckles] So let’s talk about exactly what your first assignment was when you got here. Do you want to talk about a particular incident that happened in your first role here and what you were assigned to do?

Sleeter: Okay, well, I had multiple roles. One of the roles was as a member of the Teacher Education faculty to write the document planning the Teacher Education program that would go to [C]CTC, the [California] Commission for Teacher Credentialing. That was a first role. That involved me, Maria de la Luz Reyes, Vicky Jew and a couple of consultants, one of them from CSU Chico and one who had worked for the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing. What I didn’t realize when I first came here was how much the state regulations around teacher credentialing would define the Teacher Ed program. I came here thinking that -- and Maria did the same because we had spent a lot of time talking about it --, based on the work that I'd done in teacher education and the research that I'd done for multicultural education that I could distill what I thought were the most powerful forms of teacher
education and kind of play with a new program, kind of rethinking those. For me, one of the big things that had been very central to my own learning was community-based learning.

[15:35] Here I learned the language of Service Learning, and they’re very similar, not completely identical but very similar. So, I wanted to have community-based learning as central to the Teacher Credential Program. That was something that I was really excited about. And María was excited about the idea of being able to use more literature through the program and have students discuss literature as a way of learning and then link that back to the research and texts. So she and I would talk with great excitement about the possibilities. But when it came to writing the document, starting from Day One, it became, “Okay, this needs to go in to the CTC by something like April 1st. And here we are in February, so we need to get on it really quickly.” And I remember Vicky, who had helped write the CTC document, handing me the requirements, and I wasn’t even moved in yet, and saying, “Take a look at this and here’s how we’re approaching this and see if you can see anything missing.” I looked at the document and in some ways didn’t realize that I was misinterpreting what she was asking. So I looked at the CTC documents and identified what I thought were a couple of large areas that were missing from what the state was requiring. And so I wrote it up. If I were going to rewrite them here’s what I would add. I took them back and I was proud and excited of my work, because it reflected what I brought to the table. Vicky looked at it and she said, "Oh, that wasn’t really what we meant. We’re writing to what the CTC is asking and we wondered if there was anything we were leaving out." I felt like all of a sudden the task of creating a Teacher Credential program had been turned into fill in the blanks. Vicky didn’t know me very well and didn’t know my background very well. At one point she asked, "Well, do you think you could teach the Ed Psych class?"

My background isn’t Ed Psych and, anybody who knows what I do knows that that isn’t what I do. There [18:04] also got to be this tension between bilingual education and multicultural education which I never expected to have be a core tension here. María, who is strong in bilingual education and also strong in multicultural education sort of helped --I thought she was kind of a bridge person --, but since both of us
were from outside of the CSU, it turned out to be a non-CSU versus a CSU CTC struggle. And so I eventually just pulled out of the role of working with the Teacher Credential program. Over the time that I was here, I occasionally taught a course in the program. But I just pulled out of it, and it was really painful to do that. I would sometimes talk with Dorothy [Dean Lloyd] about, "Why did you hire me if the expertise I brought can’t be used?" And she was, "Well, yeah, it can be used. It can be used" But there was this friction going on that I don't think she knew how to mediate. Vicky’s style of working was also really different from mine. At one point she was saying "I love a good fight." And for me a fight just shuts me down. I want to leave. And it was the same thing with María. So that was a difficult part of my role.

A second role that I got –

Moroh: Can I ask you a second question about that?

Sleeter: Oh, yeah.

Moroh: So what eventually happened with that? So the vanilla document just went in and that’s what the program became?

Sleeter: It just went in. That’s what the program became.

Moroh: Okay.

Sleeter: Yeah, some of the material that I guess was closer to me got put into Liberal Studies. But to me, that still wasn’t working with the whole issue of teacher preparation. I felt for a long time that the program didn’t exactly get beyond being a collection of courses. There was another piece to all of that, too, that I remember. Coming in, Dorothy wanted to work with the schools, which makes good sense. And so she organized what she called this collaborative. She contacted largely the administrators from Monterey County, to come in. And so we had this November meeting with administrators from around the county. Maria, Vicky, me and Dorothy were the four people representing Teacher Education. It was a room with about 100 people in it. All of them, with the exception of maybe two people, were white Monterey County administrators. And actually the four of us were kind of sitting there thinking, “This is going to be really
interesting trying to plan teacher education for a county where the majority of students are Latino, when there’s hardly any Latinos, Maria and one other person. Otherwise with the exceptions of Dorothy and Vicky, it’s an all-white group. That was really frustrating for Maria because the group that she was assigned to work with came in with their idea. Nancy Kotowski I think was part of that group, I may be wrong on that. But they had their idea of what teacher education should look like and it didn’t come from a multicultural, sociocultural, linguistic perspective. It just didn’t. Maria was just so frustrated. She probably talked about that in her interview.

Moroh: So I'm sorry, I interrupted you. You had said the second part of your assignment?

Sleeter: Yes, so the next part of my assignment [was that] Peter Smith gave each of us an assignment that had to do with the university as a whole. So he asked me, because I seemed to know what outcomes-based education was, and he was really interested in that, if I would be the Assessment Coordinator. [Sigh] I didn’t know how to think about that, really. I agreed to do it. I had absolutely no interest in running a testing center. But the idea of linking our curriculum with the outcomes that we had brainstormed at that [planning] meeting over in San Juan Bautista and using that as the backbone of our curriculum so that we would stay true to what I thought was the Vision that we had articulated, that was interesting to me. And when I could see that my role in Teacher Ed was a little more tenuous than I thought it would be, then I agreed to do that. At one point, somewhere along the line, this was years later, I don't really remember if I had retired by then, I was looking at something on the [CSUMB] website and it said something about the analogies that I gave about learning to drive a car -- It’s not how many hours you spend learning, it’s whether you pass the test and you get your driver’s license! That was still on the website! And I thought, “That’s my legacy from CSUMB?” [Laughs] I was like, "Oh, my God!"

Another role that I thought about was when we were looking for somebody to direct Service Learning. And I'm actually glad I didn’t do this, but for a while I thought about applying to be Director of
Service Learning. I had done a lot of community-based learning before I came here. And I was really interested in Service Learning, in the whole potential of what service learning could be. But I realized that that would take me away from the work that I'd been doing, the larger work in education and teacher education and I didn’t want to just dump that. Maria had been informally designated as the point person to put together the MA in Education program. She and I began working on that. And then when she left, I just allowed myself to slide right into the role of coordinating that program. That turned out to be probably the best thing I could have done because that did give me a teacher education program that didn’t have the CTC constraints, where I could bring to bear everything that I knew and had been working with around education and multicultural education and working with teachers, and so the program that we put together and that I was able to run for about six years was, I think, one of the most exciting things I have done in my life. And the teachers that I worked with, the faculty that I worked with, the planning process that we went through, the things that we put together, and the things that I was able to see actually working with students, that was for me a real highlight here. So directing the MA in Education Program was another role.

[26:02] Then there were also the other roles involved with putting together the university. Being on a zillion search committees, helping to get the [Faculty] Senate going, helping to get . . . Program Review. I think I wrote one of the first Program Review guidelines helping to get some of that stuff off the ground. . .

**Moroh:** G.E. [General Education]

**Sleeter:** GE? Oh, yeah. Leading. . . until Joe came along and was able to take that up. [Chuckles]

**Moroh:** Here’s a great question for the early days. Describe a typical day during the early months.

**Sleeter:** Oh, God! Oh, my! [Laughs] Well, first of all I am not sure that there was a typical day except that they were all . . . But, okay, so: Get up, go to Building A-D, whichever it was, and have one of the planning meetings. The Planning Faculty were meeting. I remember when I got to my first planning meeting, Bob van Spyk was running it. He had this chart. That gave me the illusion that there was actually a plan for planning. I realized by about the next meeting that there wasn’t because we had these rotating
chairs and he happened to be in charge that day. And then the next time somebody else was in charge and then we moved to a different topic. I’m like, “Oh, okay, we’re making this up as we go!” [Chuckles] But sitting around the table, we would have really interesting discussions about what we wanted the university to be like. Also in the process we’d be getting to know each other. So that was really interesting. We also had the calendar of how many days until the students arrived and we’d kind of look at that, and it was like, “Oh, gulp, oh God! What all do we have in front of us before they arrive?!”

[28:08] And then maybe sometime during one of those meetings somebody from the administration or from Student Services or something would come and meet with us. And then we would realize the disconnects between our discussions and discussions that were going on elsewhere. Like the time when, I think it was Bert Rivas came in with the majors that they had been recruiting students for. And we were like, "But those aren’t the majors that we’re developing!" [Laughs] So, that would be the morning. And then lunch would be either having what now is "Dishes," at the time was "Pronto Deli," come in and deliver stuff. Or when one of the [food] trucks came, we could actually go out and buy our own food. That was great, having one of those trucks there. As I remember the afternoon, we would go back and work on either programmatic stuff or search committee stuff. Or there may be other stuff to get the university going. That would be more meetings, either plowing through resumés. . . . I remember sometimes plowing through some of those resumés and just getting almost like punch drunk, sitting there with Ken Nishita doing the “paper, rock, scissors” or laughing! [Laughter] Some people would send in pictures of themselves. One woman sent something in with herself in a bikini. I was like "Oh, my God!" Somebody who had gone to clown school applied for a position. And so there would be some of that levity that would help you get through what was really this enormous task of trying to figure out who the next faculty would be.

[30:03] And then I had dogs to walk. Sometimes, I would just have to [say], "Okay, I've got to go walk my dogs" and that would be a way of "Bye, see you later." But then, since we all lived in the same area, you’d
go home, walk the dog but continue to have meetings out on the street because the people who you were working with you lived with. So it was kind of this round-the-clock exciting but also kind of exhausting.

Moroh: And how would you describe the campus culture during the first several years?

Sleeter: The first several years? I'm still in the first year.

Moroh: Well, in the first year.

Sleeter: One of the things that I think got to be dysfunctional is a culture of constant work. I've come to realize with myself, that if I overwork, I become so much less efficient and so much less creative. If I get enough rest and have time to reflect and time to kind of recreate a little bit, I can come back to tasks and do them much faster and much better than when I'm exhausted. But, we did have this sort of culture of "Oh, I'm working 80 hours a week.” “I'm working 90 hours a week.” “What? I'm only working 70 hours a week?!” And that’s not good. I think we also were having to deal with the tension between what the CSU requires and the visions that we brought. There did end up being, I think, a tension between people who had been hired from within the CSU system and people who had been hired [from] without. The people who had been hired within tended to take for granted more of the CSU ways of doing things. Not always entirely, and this was not necessarily completely true of everybody. But there was that tendency at least among the people I worked with. And the people who came from without would [ask], "Well, why does it have to be this way? Why can’t you do this?" So some of those conflicts around becoming CSU’d were I think tensions that were a part of the campus culture.

As the students got here, they were asking us on the ground what all of this stuff actually means? On a whole lot of levels that also became, I think, an important part of the campus culture. One area would just be the whole area of planning, and students wanting to know what was expected. And we weren’t sure what was expected. Us trying to figure out how to prompt student learning in an open-ended way, partly by necessity because we didn’t have a lot of stuff planned, but also gradually realizing that we needed to have more structure and more in place. There was that tension between open-endedness and students needing to
know what to do. But also around issues related to multiculturalism, to racism. The students were coming in expecting that this would be a place where, particularly students of color who had felt not welcomed in many areas of education where they had come from -- this may have been more true of African American students but there were also some Asian American students and Mexican American students who were also experiencing the same thing – and then, coming here and realizing that this wasn’t a place where everything is just absolutely wonderful. One of the things that I thought we would do as faculty is have discussions of how do you plan a curriculum when you have students coming in with widely varying levels of ethnic identity, with white students who haven’t grappled with race and ethnicity at a very deep level at all, and students of color who have, or students of color who haven’t and this is their first encounter. How do you plan the kinds of growth and learning and dialogues that will bring people together? And we never [35:03] really had those discussions. So things would erupt and we didn’t really have ways of dealing with it except then a task force would be convened. I was on two of those task forces over the years I was here. We would come up with plans and then things would sort of die down. Then, later, another issue would erupt. And then another task force would be convened. I would be [saying], "Wait a minute. Here are the notes from the last task force and what do we do with that?" [Chuckles] Because I think in some of the initial planning we were trying to do it so fast, some of the deeper questions about . . . . I go back to the initial job description that I got. If you’re coming in and you’re trying to build something around ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, women’s studies and you are trying to infuse technology and deal with historically underserved students in the tri-county region, what does that mean? I feel like I’m babbling.

Moroh: No, no, no. It’s very interesting. So let’s move from the very first days to sort of down the road. So as the campus started to take shape what were key moments of change or of struggle that stand out for you beyond the very earliest days?

[36:24] Sleeter: This is going to be what happens to pop into my mind. One of them was around who controls the curriculum. The administration or the faculty? I remember for me a key moment. I was
feeling increasingly that the faculty through the Senate didn’t have much power over decision making. Having come from Wisconsin, which has a long tradition of faculty being very active and having a lot of control over stuff, and it’s non-unionized faculty. But there is a real strong tradition in Wisconsin of faculty control over the university. I was really troubled by what I saw as just the assumption that faculty will ratify things put forward by the administration. But there are things that faculty don’t control. This was particularly around curriculum. I don't remember the exact struggle at the time but I remember saying something in one of the Faculty Senate meetings. William Franklin, a young African American guy, this was his first job and this is sort of reflective of a lot of beginning faculty members who didn’t bring experience one way or the other with faculty governance, he really got excited about that. He said “Faculty should control curriculum!” and he wanted to run with that ball. But for me, that was a moment of struggle. There’s always the tension between who controls, how much control does the faculty have, and how much control does the administration have. This has continued to be a tension. I think early on Peter [Smith] tried to minimize that by trying to have committees that had on them faculty, students, administrators and staff, which actually I think is a good idea. But then, -- some of this probably had to do within the institution of the CSU in which the administration does have more control I think across the system than it does in Wisconsin, where I came from --, you can start one way but the system tends to pull you another way. And so that was a key moment.

Another key moment of struggle around multiculturalism had to do with when Peter [President Smith] got rid of Steve Arvizu [Founding Provost] over Thanksgiving during the first year, after the students were here. At first, when I saw the email that he sent out, I didn’t know what to make of it. And then Maria said, "Well, [it’s] the competing vision. There’s Peter’s vision, there’s Steve's vision, and Peter has more power and he is just simply getting rid of Steve so that he can put in his vision.” Peter didn’t come with a vision of multiculturalism and that was the heart and soul of what Steve was trying to build. And doing it [removing Arvizu as Provost] over break, when people aren’t around, meant that there was
going to be less pushback. People would come back and be really busy and dive back into the work. And
that for me signaled kind of a watershed, of what I thought we were building as a group maybe we’re not.
Maybe the tensions around multiculturalism run way deeper than I had thought they did. The next provost
was hired, Dell [Felder]. I knew Dell a little bit because she had worked with Carl Grant who had been my
mentor and my ex-husband, and so I knew just a little bit about her. But she came in asking the question
well, “What is a Chicano? I don't know what a Chicano is.” If you come in as a provost to a university that
is trying to build itself with an ethnic studies core for working class students in the county that has the
largest proportion of Latino students and you are asking the question “What is a Chicano?” to me that
shows a level of understanding that you either need to dig in and really start bringing your understanding
up or it’s going to be a problem.

[41:29] What ended up happening was she made enough comments about the students here that were
overheard by staff who, I was told, she kind of regarded like the furniture. So she would say stuff not
realizing that here are people that she is basically talking about. So CLFSA [Chicano-Latino Faculty and
Staff Association] was formed as an organized protest really against what she was about. So I think those
are some of the key moments that really stand out for me.

Moroh: [Chuckle] So if you were to look back what would you say were the key accomplishments
of your being at the university?

[42:21] Sleeter: Okay. One of them, I do think that the MA in Education program, as we had it while I was
directing it and maybe for about a year or so afterwards, was wonderfully exciting. I developed a level of
deep appreciation for classroom teachers, because of the people who I was working with. That has really
stuck with me. Many of the people who were in the program I’ve stayed in contact with. Some of them
who were my students in my classes like fifteen years ago I am still in contact with. Some of them have
gone on to do really exciting and wonderful work. And when I would go out into some of their classrooms
and see them doing. . . . Like one elementary teacher, I remember walking into her classroom and I
[thought], "Wow! this is kind of like being in one of our MA classrooms!" in terms of how she had structured it around project-based learning, and high academic expectations and a combination of structure for the student work, with a lot of open-endedness and flexibility for students to ask questions, and select some of their own materials but still have to perform at this really high level. She said, "Yeah, that’s what I learned watching you guys!" So how that program functioned, while it was functioning, was really exciting to me. I was hoping that when I left it would have been institutionalized enough and it wouldn’t be just dependent on a few people to hold it together. But gradually people left. Kani [Blackwell] retired and went to Hawaii. Bob Hughes went to the State of Washington. So we had an attrition of faculty. Then Liz Meador, who had worked with the program and kept it going for about a year, she left and so as it got handed off. Even though I still see the description of the program on the web, I think the heart and soul of what made it work left with the people that made it what it was. But for me that was maybe the most exciting accomplishment, not a lasting accomplishment but an exciting accomplishment.

[45:11] Another thing that I think CSUMB has really held onto really well has been the project-based learning and I hope it continues to. It wasn’t just me that made project-based learning. There were a lot of people who were working with project-based learning. But through the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment [TLA] and the work that Amy Driscoll did, there’s been I think a change of the campus culture throughout to honor project-based learning and really take the scholarship of teaching seriously. When I’ve been on other campuses talking about the potential of faculty and project-based learning and faculty learning teaching through working together and having the faculty seminars that we would have, sometimes other people would look at me and go, "Wow, I wish I could work in a place like that!" So that’s a real positive.

The ethos of struggling with multiculturalism still continues. I don't know if it’s productive because I’m not there anymore. But from what I hear, at least the students are becoming if anything more diverse. We are continuing to graduate large numbers of historically underserved students who are going on and
doing things. The UROC program [Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program], even though I didn’t have anything to do with it, there’s a philosophical similarity with it and what we were doing with the MA in Education program. At the time, I was keeping data. About a quarter of our MA in Education graduates were going on for doctoral programs and they were mostly from historically underserved groups. The thesis that we would require was a thesis that, I’ve heard back from a lot of the students when they went to their doctoral programs, was kind of like a doctoral dissertation. So when they got into a doctoral program it felt comfortable because they’d gotten pushed in their MA program. In fact, some of them said that the doctorate was almost easy compared to the pushing that they were getting from us. So at least seeing that enacted in the UROC program, I walk into that and say, "Okay, this is something familiar to me," in terms of taking historically underserved students and really pushing them academically so that they are doing really super things.

Moroh: Let’s go back to where we were talking about the reasons for leaving and beyond the workload and the other things that you had mentioned that you wanted to expand on.

Sleeter: Well, for me it did get to be the workload. Because, as I said, I was always trying to balance the external work that I do with what I was doing at CSUMB. = I felt very much like the external work that I was doing greatly enriched what I was doing at CSUMB. As an example, for several years I was editing a series of books for the State University of New York Press. I would get manuscripts from book authors and I learned how to give really good feedback. I also did this with other people I was mentoring, giving really good feedback to people on their writing. So I would bring that same kind of writing feedback and helping people learn how to frame research, to do research, into the work that I did with students here. Including Liberal Studies students. I had taught for a while in Liberal Studies and sort of turned it into a kind of a mini research class, and the students really liked it. So there was this reciprocity in my life between the work here and the external work where both were enriching each other. But I couldn’t keep doing it all. With the MA program, as Director of the program, everybody who wanted to
come into the program would come and meet with me. We got very few applications just out of the blue. We got some, but most of the time people wanted to come in and talk with me. And then we would assign advisors. Often, if I had been the person who met the person, I would start off as first advisor, the academic advisor. I was really glad when my administrative assistant learned how to do the advising because that took a load off of me. But then the thesis advising was huge. And every thesis had two advisors, the person teaching Capstone and somebody else. I think I was probably for a while thesis advisor for about half of the [50:24] students. I remember we had an external reviewer come in during the WASC review, Patricia Gándara. She said, "Christine, you can’t keep doing this." She said, "When I interviewed the students and I was asking them who is their advisor, all of them were saying you were! And you can’t keep doing this!"

And I said, "I know!" So in putting my budget together I worked with Joe [Larkin] on trying to figure out how to work in release time for people for thesis advising. We would use formulas like from science around labs. So I kept trying to bring up to Dorothy [Dean Lloyd] that there was this desperate need for thesis advising because we just couldn’t keep up. I refused to give up the rigorous quality of what we were doing. I knew we could go back to a master’s degree that didn’t have a research thesis. But I wouldn’t do that because for me there was an ethical issue here. Students who go to the CSU’s are mostly working class students who can’t afford to go to a UC, who can’t afford to go to Stanford, who are going to where they can afford to go to. We have an obligation to give them the most high [sic] quality education possible. I didn’t want to give them a cut rate education even if the funding wasn’t the same as the funding at a UC [University of California]. I would sometimes talk with some of my UC colleagues about some of the funding differentials. With one of my friends at UC Santa Cruz, we get together for lunch every once in a while. Even though I know they have some big classes there’s also enough of a differential in funding that they can offer a doctoral program, they can have graduate students. We would talk about how we had the [52:35] diverse students. Their students were mostly white in their graduate program. And so it’s not fair to scale back what we offer our students. But you can’t also just do it on the backs of faculty. So I kept
trying, for about three or four years, through the budget process, through advocating, through showing data of "Look at how our graduates reflect the demographics of California! Isn’t that wonderful?" And people were going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s nice. Let’s go on." And it just didn’t happen. For about a year I was telling Dorothy that “I’m not going to last!” “I’m not going to last!” And then, finally, "I’m retiring."

Moroh: So maybe a good group of questions to end with were the ones about the Vision. You said a little bit about what it meant to you and what attracted you, the pieces of the Vision. Maybe you want to talk a little bit about that. And then what it is that you see was actually realized on the campus as you were leaving. Kind of your reflections on that.

Sleeter: It’s real hard to speak about the campus as a whole because I was so invested time-wise in the program I was working with, which did, I think, a really good job of enacting all of the parts of the Vision. Certainly the multicultural part was like core to me. I learned a tremendous amount about technology and using technology as a tool in teaching. Then, working with Bob Hughes, who came in with a stronger tech background than I did. We started putting a lot of stuff online not for purposes of doing distance learning but for purposes of making our syllabus and some of what we were doing in classes a lot more accessible to students. So while they were studying at home or if they missed a class or something, that the stuff was still there. In terms of serving students out in the community, we took a cohort of the Master’s program up to Watsonville and physically traveled up there to offer some of the classes in the library of an elementary school, as a part of trying to do outreach to the community and make things accessible. But I think there were parts of the Vision that helped me expand what I was doing and technology, I think, is a big part of that. In terms of the campus as a whole at this point, I don’t really know. I always felt sort of an affinity with HCOM [Humanities and Communication] because their classes just resonate [with me]. For a while I probably could have taught in HCOM as easily as I could have taught in Teacher Ed. Then VPA [Visual and Public Art] around multiculturalism in the community, the
RUAP [Reciprocal University of the Arts Program] project that Amalia [Mesa-Bains] was doing, was something that I got really excited about. But as I say, I mostly know the things I was working on.

The Teacher Credential program itself, I think, has always been more tied to CTC [California Commission on Teacher Credentialing] than to the vision of CSUMB. At one point early on I just decided there’s nothing I can do about that. I remember I used to talk with Teacher Ed faculty about things that I thought were really missing from the Teacher Ed program. The focus on bilingual education is good and important, the focus on language, but it needs to be linked with the focus on racism and ethnicity. We don’t teach our students, for instance, anything particular that is going to help them become successful teachers of African American students. I would get met with things like, “I thought that happened in another class.” Or "Well, can you give me a reading?" That’s just like – it misses the point.

[57:13] With community-based learning, that for me was central to my own learning to teach and there’s a body of research that confirms that. I would go to Teacher Ed meetings. The Teacher Ed faculty [said]

"Well, come to our meetings. We are going to do some re-planning." So, okay. I don’t really like going to meetings. But I go to a Teacher Ed meeting and argue for community-based learning [that] needed to be a part of Teacher Ed. There were two faculty members in Teacher Ed who were always with me on that. Others, as we would start, "Okay, well, we can only offer so many credits. So okay, we’ll give that two credits. Oops, we need one of those credits over here. Oops!" And so it would just sort of fall off the table. For me the question would be around how do you best prepare teachers to be excellent teachers of the students in this region? The central question would be, "Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, well here is our last CTC. . . “ So I was just like, “You know, I’ve got better things to do.”

Moroh: So any last thoughts about, say, what you wished you had accomplished that you weren’t able to? It kind of ties right into what you were just saying.

[58:38] Sleeter: Well, no. I’m glad I came here. There are times when I look at some of my colleagues who are in Research One [R1] institutions and who didn’t retire when they were 55 because they got
exhausted, and I think that could have been a path that I could have taken and it wouldn’t have been a bad path. Ultimately, I think I have always chosen to be…it’s not like I’ve chosen not to go to an R1, but I’ve more chosen to work in places where most of the students are working class students because I enjoy teaching and they’re the students that I enjoy teaching. But it takes sort of a toll. Yeah! [Chuckles]

Moroh: Any last thoughts? Any last share about your experiences?

Sleeter: No, it’s brought up a whole lot of stuff I hadn’t actually thought about for a while.

Moroh: Really. For me, too.

Sleeter: Anything that you’d like to ask me that you wondered about? Or…?

Moroh: Well, I learned a lot from this interview. [Laughter] Let’s see. This is maybe a hard question but if you had it to do it over again knowing what you know now, would you have approached the beginning differently? Maybe it’s an unfair question, but I’m just thinking, we know a lot about how things unfolded and how we thought we had this great freedom to think through a university. And then somebody forgot to tell us that there were all these rules that we actually had to follow. So would you have approached the whole thing differently?

Sleeter: One little anecdote about that. Do you remember Peter Hoff? He was working with the CSU system. He was working under [CSU Chancellor] Barry Munitz for a while. And he had for a while been in Wisconsin. So I had met him. I didn’t know him well but I had met him. I remember when I first got hired here, running into him and now I don’t even remember if it was here or if it was in Wisconsin. And he said, “You have a window. Be as innovative as you can.” And that was coming from the CSU. So I think there was a shift. The CSU does have its ways of doing things. But there may have been an open window that closed . . . and we didn’t know that.

Moroh: We didn’t realize. We didn’t see it, or see it coming.

Sleeter: Yeah. I think if I had had something to do differently and I don’t know – I mean I really loved working with the MA in Education program and I really wish I wouldn’t have burned out as
thoroughly as I did. I didn’t even FERP [Faculty Early Retirement Program], when I retired. I just retired because I was so burned out. But maybe I would have tried to get more specific about why I was being hired for the Teacher Credential Program and how much creativity and latitude I would have. Because that turned out to be a very large disappointment.

Moroh: And made that deal up front before you got here.

Sleeter: Yeah. Yeah.

Moroh: Interesting.

Sleeter: And if I had known that . . . I don't know if I would have even gotten an answer to that, but if I would have known that the reality of the expectation was one of fill-in-the-blanks, I’m not sure if I would have come.

Moroh: But you’re not sorry that you did.

Sleeter: I’m not sorry I did. I just sort of wish I hadn’t burned out when I did. But I did.

Moroh: Thank you.

Sleeter: Thank you.

(END OF RECORDING)

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